



ART RECESS 2

SOMETHING LIKE P.F.S. POST 2

From *P.F.S. Post*

[THE STORY'S IN THE BROKEN SHELLS]

The story's in the broken shells, the fissures
of the rocks. The water left those cracks.
And it was the sea that rocked; that sang
its story of self or selves. I said,
You see me? And it did:
the sea saw.
I'm lying. It was a river
that ran nearest us, and all that night
I dreamt of alkali, *dissolve*.
That's why I say the sea, I like the salt.

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Adam Fieled (Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, USA): "Elsewhere"

Even in the depths of adolescent degeneracy, I
didn't think of my conquest of Washington Square
Park as anything that important. It had seemed
simple, to me, to master the deals system around
the park. Mastering said system meant that if I
wanted to score a twenty-bag, at any time, I could.
The action around Washington Square Park was
pretty lowly stuff; my entire life in Manhattan turned
out to be pretty lowly. Rather than a small, cozy
college town, what we had here was a fiery furnace,
a big, ugly juggernaut, eagerly ripping anything or

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Adam Fieled
(Plymouth
Meeting,
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From After the Lost
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From Stoning the
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More from P.F.S.
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anyone to shreds whose ass wasn't completely covered. I somehow managed to salvage for myself a bedsit in Park Slope, Brooklyn, after crashing for

a while on the Upper West Side and the East Village. My meandering day to day life, between looking for straightforward work, looking for work in theater, trying to get published, and haphazardly recording music, was a narrow tunnel, over the course of that year, and if I was going to survive, it wasn't here. I found Manhattan to be Deathsville. One day that spring, I was doing my usual aimless park routine, and someone was following me. She sat on the bench, on the perimeter of the park, to see what I was doing. She would've noted I was even skinnier than usual. The eyes, round and brown, reflected a side angle that tilted slightly to reveal them as loopy, alien-like. Could be painted. The life-force energy was still there. This boy, another artist, had a future. Elsewhere.

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More from *Ocho #11*

DRINKING TOGETHER, LI PO AND I ADMIRE WANG'S GARDEN

We go back and forth like this:
raising our gin soaked chins
to a translucent daytime moon,
toasting the indecent goldenrod,
the sweet sting of morning,
then, falling deep into an unbelievable 10 am,
memorizing the hibiscus.

Last night, a dozen friends joked
as you stripped clean and rode the rope
swing into the river. Afterwards, the wine wet,
the grass low and dying, we vowed to cherish
the balding crocus in sickness and health.



This morning we watch the birds
return one by one to Wang's roof,
our backs against the same oak,
our tumblers now empty.
I am drifting in and out of consciousness,
but you are still awake, writing something down,
transfixed by willow-blossom, the call of the moon,
willow-blossom, moon, blossom, moon.

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From *Ocho* #11

UPON HEARING THAT SHE AND THE MAN WITH WHOM SHE CHEATED ARE GETTING MARRIED
after Mary Oliver

Somewhere behind me
the staccato of young men,
their laughter, a fitting truth,
something I wish I had
moments ago when the news
covered my body like sudden
rain. Beside me, an umbrella
I've carried since morning.
I hope to God I don't forget it
when it's time again to leave.
I've ruined more evenings that way,
shoes soaked, body shaking.
I don't know what kind of animal
love is. I do know how to pray
on bent knees for someone
else's failure. From the ledge
of a lonely and startled dream,
I put my hands together and begin
the way anyone would: *Dear God*

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From No Tell Motel

CONSTELLATIONS OF GIRLS IN RED

Eight o'clock and we open
our skirts, our rumpled lace.
Black gloved in the wings,

passing cigarettes and flirting
with the pianist. Night
folds me like a doll into a dress,

lusting for copper, chocolate,
whatever I can bite down
on. I am especially attuned

to wrists, the rehearsal
within the rehearsal.
Floorboard creaks and fire hazards.

The soloist offers me
a jug of wine, a catbird.
Can do a trick with flying

that puts the aerialist to
shame. *Mechanics*, she says,
all pulleys and wires.

Her music box plays something
that sounds like Wagner.
My hair tangles in her paper fan.

There's a crumpled dollar
in my pocket, three gallons
of salt water in the larder.

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More from Dusie

ROPE DANCE

Morning is a burned thing, Louise.
Spoiled like a shuttered house.

Paper everywhere— under the beds,
in the dresser, floating
the pale skin of soup.

You make a cage of your fingers
to keep out light. Chicken bones
to keep out the dead. Grey
where it's all wearing at the ends.

Your braids still tied in a V
when the dark comes to you like a cat.
A long hallway. A girl in pink
sateen against a backdrop of stars.

Make one turn, then another.
When you shut all the latches,
shut your eyes. A little gin, Louise.

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ART RECESS 2

SOMETHING LIKE P.F.S. POST 2

From *Dusie*

TRIO

the postulates, the premises, the blankets, and the pastries
the lie of the matter
was a use
completed / what you
have were two guys
the trappings of having
even in the cold evening
a sort of nostalgia but
the dream, the curriculum
quit falling
spars and plangent, paltry
accounts withstanding
there's a buck to be
with you, I would prefer
drinks and fights
come out one way

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Ephemera: beginning the work

Works of art function, on a cultural level, as both message-carriers and symbolic talismans. To the extent that the intentions of the artist are taken seriously, the artist him or herself becomes a message-carrier and a symbolic talisman. This is the art-function that forms the basis for the study of artists and works of art as semiology. Yet, in framing a work of art, criticism always presents a de Man-ian crisis situation, which brings to light an issue, which, unsatisfyingly, lacks objectivity, but is

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compellingly magnetic enough to be irresistible (to some) nonetheless. This is the issue of *perfection*. There cannot be, objectively, a *perfect* work of art, but the critical brain nonetheless may be compelled at any moment to have recourse to a perceived perfection inhering in a work of art. That criticism and crisis can be objective, a reaction to an existing situation or context, or subjectivist, a personal stream of consciousness following or developing from close, patient study of cultural products, is taken for granted. When I begin to contemplate the years I have spent studying *Ephemera*, an early poem by early Mod or Edwardian poet William Butler Yeats, I understand that the crisis latent in the poem for me was slow to materialize. But materialize it did, and now, in 2025, in the mode of crisis, the issue forces its hand. Could it be that *Ephemera* is the most perfect poem in the English language? If this is acknowledged as at least a possibility, could we extrapolate from said possibility that Yeats takes a vaunted place above the major Romantics and Milton, superior to them in allegiance to textual intensity, dramatic sweep, and symbolic weight?

The poem itself must take the floor and speak for itself. Worth noting that *Ephemera* is not seen to be in the first tier of Yeats' oeuvre. How this is possible is simple: it lacks the representationally bardic stance which is seen, critically, to lend Yeats his largesse. The modesty in the poem, however, inhering on a surface bereft of seeming socio-historical import (often the stock-in-trade of Yeats' first tier) in favor of a small incident or situation, is balanced by a surfeit of semantic, and imagistic, gorgeousness. An apogee, as it were, of the pure and purely aesthetic. Apogee, also, suggesting the perfection bardic postures often miss:

*"Your eyes, that once were never weary of mine,
are bowed in sorrow under pendulous lids,
because our love is waning."*

And then she:

*"Although our love is waning, let us stand
by the lone border of the lake once more,
together in that hour of gentleness
when the poor, tired child, Passion, falls asleep:
how far away the stars seem, and how far
is our first kiss, and ah, how old my heart!"*

*Pensive, they paced along the faded leaves,
while, slowly, he whose hand held hers replied:
"Passion has often worn our wandering hearts."*

*The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves
fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once
a rabbit, old and lame, limped down the path;*

Autumn was over him: and now they stood
on the lone border of the lake once more:
turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves,
gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,
in bosom and hair.

“Ah, do not mourn,” he said,
“that we are tired, for other loves await us;
hate on and love through unrepining hours.
Before us lies eternity; our souls
are love, and a continual farewell.”

The formal component of *Ephemera* which most distinguishes itself is that it is free verse. As was the case when *Ephemera* was written (1889), perfection in English-language poetry without end-rhyme (or at least the sturdiness, strictures of blank verse) was unthinkable. Yet never, in said English language, have assonance and alliteration so accomplished the yeoman’s task of making the piece shudder, oscillate, scintillate, resonate as they do here. The third stanza (“Pensive...hearts”) is a foray into a mysticism of the English language which mirrors all the signified mysticisms in the *mise en scene*, built into the exquisitely represented landscape. Close reading, however, in the manner of the New Critics, can only take us so far here. It is enough to know that the line-by-line reality of the piece subsists on a level of extremely tautened dynamic tension. The two lovers stand, and walk, but never sit; that establishes the physiology of the poem tautened, taken care of. They also seem to inquire of the woods and the lake whether their shared assumption, of also shared obsolescence, is correct. A felt, affirmative answer closes the circular paths they walk. The dialogue could be taken as mannered. If I do not take it that way, it is because the physiological tension built into the piece renders the dialogue more potent, more raw. Physiological tension, also, missing, it might be said, in the effete languidness of *Adam’s Curse*. Which, of course, is higher placed in Yeats’ oeuvre, and bears some similarity to *Ephemera*.

The next inquiry closes our own circle back to the idea, quixotic or not, of *perfection*. The mirroring physiology of the reader most closely attuned to *Ephemera*— why is there something perfect here, in 2025? Yeats’ brief sojourn into free-verse crushes the life out of what has been written in the English language since 1889— yet the form of the piece seems beamed to him, in mystical Yeats-ian fashion, from a race whose prescience as regards 2025 was razor sharp. Yeats speaks to us now, today. *Ephemera* becomes a backwards, forwards moving warp from 1889, and the sense of a time and matter consuming warp is what reaches us, on a wavelength immaculately attired.

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The Modernity of *Ephemera* distinguishes it, too. Critical and scholarly confusion tends to place Yeats in a mélange of different, uncomfortable positions as regards literary Modernity. Yeats is either (hesitantly, tentatively) the first true literary Modernist, or an Edwardian-cum-late Romantic. The elements of *Ephemera* which make it extraordinary, and a hinge to *perfection*— a tautened sense of physiological tension (dynamism), and a sense, also, of a new, streamlined approach to sonority in the English language, wherein free-verse can resonant or shudder as convincingly as end-rhymed material — subsist. Yet there is also, built into *Ephemera*, and adumbrating the entire twentieth century which followed from it, a sense which scholars might tend to miss, of the *cinematic*. The fractures and abrasions built into *Ephemera* mirror the fractures and abrasions built into cinematic expression, shot (or succession of shots) by shot (or succession of shots). This, complete with dialogue without end-rhyme consigning it to the dust-bin of the Mannered, the effete. *Ephemera* reads (or views) as, among other things, a short film:

*The woods were round them, and the yellow leaves
fell like faint meteors in the gloom, and once
a rabbit, old and lame, limped down the path;
Autumn was over him: and now they stood
on the lone border of the lake once more:
turning, he saw that she had thrust dead leaves,
gathered in silence, dewy as her eyes,
in bosom and hair.*

Real, live action, in real time, followed camera-style. That sense of prescience in *Ephemera*, which broadens the significations out of its Modernity past usual Modern parameters (parts rather than wholes, formal fractures rather than seamlessness, collage-like impulses), takes and electrifies its sense of constructed-ness with a sense of change, dynamism, vitality. In other words, this reading of Yeats says that he, at his most perfect, is triumphantly Modern. Picture-ism in the *Prelude*, especially the more memorable encounters, happens yet (blank verse not having to be a deterrent) with one-ended dynamism. In other words, Wordsworth has a dynamic reaction to something static. *The Prelude* suffers massively from the absence of the precise, perfected dynamic tension which electrifies, makes cinematic (anticipatory) *Ephemera*. Moreover, dialogue cannot be electrically charged in the *Prelude*, because there is none. Yeats configured as a late Romantic does a disservice to the idea that fracturing, in Modernity, can in fact take the form of internal *electrification* (incandescence) of elements. The jaggedness of the text is then an embedded sense that it cannot stay still within itself. The text *moves*.

Electrification creates confusion. Those who might want to dismiss *Ephemera* on account of its brevity, in defense of a twentieth century talisman like *The Waste Land*, are missing the point. The nature of *Ephemera*'s twenty-six lines renders *The Waste Land*, like *Prelude*, at least a semi-moot point, owing to Eliot's caddishness, boorishness, and lack of dynamic integrity. By dynamic integrity, I

mean that there are no sequences in *The Waste Land* tautened around physiological dynamism, to compare with *Ephemera*. *The Waste Land* describes itself perfectly— it does not move. With Wordsworth on one side and Eliot on the other, Yeats is the wavelength frequency most attuned to what happened in art in the twentieth century which was worth noting. The sense that Modernity was one big move— from the wholesome to the unholy, the sanctified to the irreligious, belief to irony— is anticipated by *Ephemera* having game live action, real time, camera-style. Eliot described himself as, in the context of *The Waste Land*, *rhythmically grumbling*; Yeats does more than that. Cinema follows from Modernism as an ancillary channel, not respecting wholes, showing what they care to show, nothing less, nothing more. Why cinema is often credited with more vitality than literature in the twentieth century is that the basic principles, *magnetism* and *fascination*, are not attended to by Modernist literature to right way. If Yeats emerges, without a sense of the hesitant or the tentative, as the most advanced (whole, entire) Modernist voice, it is because his willingness to include action in poetry, leading to a perceptive response (magnetized, fascinated, led in productive circles), is more convincing in the twenty-first century than what has already been posited. The stasis of Eliot, as the most likely alternative, is signifying.

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Connecting *Ephemera* with anything after Modernism (but before what I call Neo-Romanticism) is a strain. The chiasmus between *Ephemera* and the cinema moves the piece hesitantly, delicately towards post-modernity. But the deep-seated pathos, elegiac tone, and straightforward, linear narrativity of *Ephemera* (linear narrativity not precluding innovation on other formal and thematic levels) all chafe against the sardonic, ironic, corrosive, and yet ultimately heartless heart of post-modernity. Indeed, putting *Ephemera* on the hot-seat next to ordained post-modern products is a pointless exercise. With *The Prelude* and *The Waste Land* there is a point; by *The Emperor of Ice Cream* (as illustrative), there is none. Not to mention other American junk-heaps like Black Mountain and San Francisco Renaissance. Let's skip, if we shall, to the Aughts in America, and the beginning of more action (*live action*) more germane. I have, in a manner of speaking, affixed to the many female artists of the Aughts (American stripe) to develop a new post-feministic mold or prototype they all happen to fit. There she stands before us, if you will: the *Creatrix*. As I have adumbrated the Creatrix-as-construct, and the entire formulation as a subset of Neo-Romanticism, the Creatrix feeds, as post-modernity did not (neither do multi-culturalism and academic feminism), on narratives of form and passion, delivered from stances of settled self-sufficiency. Grandstanding, proselytizing, or playing to a perceived crowd is thus eschewed. Narratives connote stories represented in a discernible way. Form and passion remain self-explanatory. An interesting narrative, as in *Ephemera*, is then accredited with a sense of innovation. Forms rendered interestingly, also innovation. Entropy into incomprehensibility, nothing. Formless forays into the obviously anti-aesthetic, also nothing.

So, about this *live action* I have been promising. The locale happens, interestingly, to be New England, and the name of the writer is **Rebecca Hilliker**. Let's take a look at *Catch*, and discern if we might how conventional textual tactics can be made to serve innovative ends:

*The wind turns the water into an animal
and the boat rides the back of swells,
bucking wetly.
My legs absorb the push and pull,
thinking only of the fish,
sleek and dripping on the line,
neon green parachute ballooning
from its mouth.*

*I arch my back
and the rod dives.
The fish lifts, slimy as an egg,
spinning like a ballerina
on a silver thread,
its marble eye mute,
fixed on white.*

*How many times
did you find this world,
blinded, terrified?
There are hands on you
and pliers in your mouth,
metallic, blood-washed.
How many times have you waited
for the water
while everything lurches around you,
brilliant white, like the inside
of a hospital, like the underbelly
of a dream, gasping
to break the surface
toward that cold & sudden light?*

Like *Ephemera*, physiological tension or tautness makes the poem serve a visceral end of magnetism, fascination. It might also be said that magnetism and fascination in text are impossible without narrative to hook potentially engaged consciousness. This can be done with fulsome narrative, or what **Roland Barthes** refers to as *bits* of narrative; but the narrative sector must be filled in

somehow. Why *Catch* creates an interesting chiasmus with *Ephemera*, is that in *Ephemera*, the sense of a tense, tautened physiology plays against a formal conceit: free-verse used to create aesthetic effects usually created by end-rhymes. In *Catch*, the tense, tautened physiology plays against an origin-seeking phenomenological fantasy, wherein the protagonist transubstantiates herself into animal form. A visual, rather than an aural, change. In *Ephemera*, an elegiac effect is created by two lovers parting ways, who stay discrete, do not meld. In *Catch*, a sense of disorientation or dementia is created (cinematic also, as in *The Fly*) by a lack of cognitive discretion. The protagonist has a sense of identification that brings the poem to an intense, incandescent, partially horrific crescendo. *Ephemera* remain genteel; *Catch* does not. The sense of live action that they share, shot by shot, succession by succession, connects both pieces to a textual continuum what brings texts to the brink of the sublime, when the sublime (as in **Schopenhauer**) is imposing, overwhelming, either gently so (Yeats) or luridly (Hilliker).

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The final wraparound of Yeats to 2025 is that there is no final wraparound. It is not for one critic, one artist to define a poet of Yeats' magnitude. It simply needs to be said that hidden in *Ephemera* is a passkey, heretofore overlooked, to a textual world now inhabitable at a high level. Why, say, twenty years ago, no one on the American landscape would have been interested, is that too many minds were focused on movements, and works-within-movements, that would be precluded from having long-term impact or potential. No one wanted to say, in Amer-Indie in 2005, that the emperor was wearing no clothes, in many then-prominent directions. In 2025, we are less coy. Time, as ever, is an avenger, taking spurious textual mountains and chopping them down. If you can say there is any redeeming value or noblesse oblige in holding down the fort for obvious nonsense and self-demolishing babble, it is only that the American academy at large, and the American literary establishment, is still afraid of the sense of classicism, imaginative expansiveness, and semantic interest which must inhere in poetry which could endure not only here, but from here to the Continent, as well. This is an ultimate question to reckon, which takes the bright beginning of *Jacket* in the Aughts and extends it indefinitely— when there is American poetry ambitious enough to go Continental in a major way, what route will it take to get there? How long will the journey be?

And back to Yeats. Why the Yeats version, as this critic sees it, of Modernism— not afraid to employ narrative to generate magnetism and fascination, but also able to innovate towards revelations not just of visceral urgency and symbolic heft but of gracefulness, beauty, *perfection*— deserves its place next to other narratives of Modernism and the Modern, is that too much other Modern work is, however innovative, too imperfect. Anti-aesthetic. Banal. Suggestive to too many writers that the emperor is wearing no clothes, and that the avant-garde in America is compelled to bow down to false idols. That this is a clarion call to *conservatism*, or to embrace *conservatism*, is a true *bete noir* in the mix. That we withstand less and less being offered under pretenses of innovation, under the

threat that the impulse towards wholesomeness, aesthetic well-roundedness, and the pursuit of a beauty itself is a conservative impulse— oh what a *scarecrow* it is!

Yeats and *Ephemera* beckon from a place wherein things are what they are. The *major* is really the *major*, and not secretly something else, and the minor, the reductive, the *untalented*, generates no idols to bow down before. All this is Neo-Romantic rhetoric. The same way that Becky Hilliker's *Catch* is its own kind of (Neo-Romantic, post-feminist) rhetoric about what contemporary, major poetry in the English language might look like, unconstrained by the false modesty of its being seen through post-modern, multi-cultural, or academic feminist filters or lenses. The way-station that was *post-avant* served its purpose twenty years ago— to demonstrate an abrasion, a rupture (just like *Catch* is a rupture or crisis for our moment in the Twenties), against the Amer-Indie status quo. Now, the sense that Yeats may be the Mod of choice for Neo-Romanticism can move an enterprise forward which wants to involve, not only England and Australia like *Jacket*, but France and Germany, too. To offer our wares in the land of Kant, particularly, is to *get real* on a new level, and demonstrate consonance with pushing up not down.

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From *The Brownstone Review*

THE STRANGER

Consider life's billion anxious
gulps of oxygen, smog porridge
sucked ad nauseam. If a wily

Camus invites us to agree
that Sisyphus is happy, I'm
satisfied to dream Camus'

Algeria: super-heated sands
hemming the Mediterranean,
and a raucous newborn

gleaming with slime, a just-plucked
shell held high into the sun. Her
nomad-father's rutted palms

obliterate all light, his desert-
dimmed eyes squinting to find

stripes, moles, stigma, signs—

imperfections to justify
a drowning. No surprise. Just too few
dried figs, no gods or fires

driving them forward, into the sea,
ancient terrors, shallow waters
heaving salt, fish, history.

© Susan Wallack 1995

More from Columbia Poetry Review

DEAR GR

dear gr
etchen. hellos. i was
just now mentioning
to Pietyr of Left
Bank fame, you
know; it is 12:46 &
the play re
sumed with Lolita
in the role of Carl
Orf sans the uncome
ly goatee & it

is seven of march ninetee
n ninety-six is 12:47 or so
Europeans write; i am
so sorry I didn't call yr

dance di
tracted me, desdom
ona shrt of brth in blue tights & fal
setto applause to thine own self. hellos. de
ar gretchen it is t
ime for a new style this

one is tight!

at the cuffs yr
mother agrees w
ith me & the last act of “
Carmen but Pietyr

dear Gretchen: pietyr dis
sents he says to thine o
wn self is a but much Oh

the dress-ups! the autumn black ties bowing
over the varnisht parquee & fire-
flies wilde! on the hem & mown lawn, ja! an
ev’nin tea; it
is 12:57 mail
will come at noo
n or one
p.m., wearing a leather jerkin, &
the letter will read:

dear gretchen & dear not unkindly, vast, holy. hellos. i will b
e at the Concessions where Milly of La Rue St. Jean sells cig
arettes/ bubble gums/ ta
piocca pies & she loves me! & I love her! we h
ave never met ‘formal’ but the wedding’s in June Oh
spangld garlnd or bougainvillea, orchid, the padre presides
: will you, sin
cerely, the ai
sle dance/ with a skit of blue orchids, yr beautiful two-step fire-
fly thine-own-Self? dear

© Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum 1999

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ART RECESS 2

SOMETHING LIKE P.F.S. POST 2

Adam Fieled (editor, Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania): "High Ceilings"

And was it accursed to the eons, for a whole lot of people, that it should be that way? I am thinking of the January night in Logan Square, when Mary and I first went nuptial. That it was so raw, so real, so about hungry people being able to feed, and being so against the starving, threadbare multitudes, lost in mutilated lives— accursed to the eons? It was everything we'd have to pay for, that's for sure. But the way the Nineties worked, Mary and I both found time to become educated semi-avatars at the big fleshly discipline. My main route or thoroughfare was that, right on the surface. State College saw me, in fact, emerge as a sexualized, not really scamp, sub-scamp or post-scamp. Mary's route was more twisted, around John, and into other turf. Guys in her business who

had a sense of mercy for the artist in her, were willing to go the distance with her, teach her the ropes, bring her up to speed, so that even then Byron for her had to be a composite. The sense of anonymity around her coming of age was clouded also by intoxication, by associating the carnal with the clouded torpor of being high. She never talked too much, in later times, about the sense of pedagogical interest she inspired. Yet it was clear, by the enfranchised January night, that she knew herself in a way womanly, not girlish, and that the rigors of mattress-thumped satiety were accompanied for her with familiarity. Not to mention, also, entitlement, the sense that she deserved a physical self conversant in ecstasy, well-roundedness. Houses with high ceilings.

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From Tears in the Fence 60

MISTER RIGHT

I do my bit with ruffled peonies,
water them right, their pink Asian tumbles,
thinking of you Bill and your deepening
into compassion, distinctly London
picked up experience, capital affairs

pulled from the West End's generic corral
of edge-walkers, what you called sensitives,
same-sex attracted, non-scene, soft movers
who came by you, we meet the ones we need,
by accident in 12 million stressed lives

surfacing out the tube atlas each day.
I never knew you get character wrong
in terms of seeing hurt as signature
to being special, like shyness rewrites
a hidden kindness, and these spilled peonies

get coaxed into pink focus by the sun.
To me, first meeting, you were Mister Right,
the city in you like an investment
in transitioning decades, earlier
we'd have been lovers, later we were friends

who loved each other, optimized shared time
through every illness driven in your cells
as undercover guerilla attack,
pushing sympathies forward— what was it
a favorite oatmeal jumper you wished back?

From X-Peri

IF, AS HEIDEGGER SAYS,

Language is the house of being, where
do we put the mimes and their
dime store plastic flowers? What do we do
with the single-syllable words that are too small
to move into? Remember last week when
the mouse fell asleep in the backyard clover,
and the poet-composer warped the same thought
into seven kinds of flight? We climbed the ladder
of an ancient syntax and discovered
that the cathedral we were birthing had no
windows. Who will open the cages we've built
around ourselves? How will we capture
the slippery accents of home on someone
else's tongue? If *language is the house of being*,
then being is the house of a little talking dove,
and the little talking dove is the house of a secret,
and the secret is the house of silence, and silence
is the house of dime store plastic flowers
and the two-story mouths that carry them.

© Melissa Studdard 2020

From Columbia Poetry Review 13

UNEURYDICE

jan
uary 13teenth and then "hook'd
up" on jan

uary 2twenty2econd, then i
guess we were dating & he says
i guess we're "dating" and i got roses and i
gave him head and he

w

as stretched out on the seat of his Thunde
rbird he says we're "not dating" that w
as

jan
uary 2wenty5ifth it w
as wetsnowing I gu

ess i lost my virginity "like
when you say your n
ame over

and over and it's not
about you anym
ore on jan

uary 2wenty6ixth i kiss'd
him and i w
as

drunk i guess i
pass'd out and woke up after i had
a dream a

bout red tigers and gentle Arab reeds he
held my head and with b
oth hands it

was so sweet but both hands were w
et i was als
o wet on jan

uary
2wenty9inth i thought of him on january 3irti 0eth i got roses and i
stretched out on the seat of his Cavel

ier my red hair was w
etsnow and he says i guess it's "you" and
then "no" i sh

ake my red hair "no" by
then it was febr
uary 1rst

© Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum 2001

From *Otoliths*

STREET, VASE, TIDE

The vase with peonies was struggling on the edge of the table
eyed by a cat and surrounded by words percolating in hands
and in the exhausted mind of the lady collapsed on the couch.
Burgundy with swirls, cotton— the feel of the space not captured where
again— she heard her sharecropper mum— *stay strong, hold on,*
for the streets are not friendly and the flowers fade.

The hideous statue opposite hers is now falling— dust on too many ashes.
Her vision lands and falls, bobbing on light waves alone
as the toppled colonizer bobs on waves of protests
and voices sprayed on country walls as time.
As the flowers resign, those 20 shots ricochet in her
ear memory like sinuous tides stretched inland.

© William Allegrezza-Serena Piccoli 2020

From *Poetry*

NO WHERE, NO ONE

When I found my voice, it was so quiet
no one listened. No one. That was my best love.

And when I came up from the river muck
I found my face; that was like smiling.

The snake does not care, nor the white egret—

and whole flocks of geese, white and Canadian,

settle on the boat landing. *Rubbish.*

Rubbish and weeds. It was not so quiet

when I screamed; with my face in the water,
not a whisper. Drowned or owned,

I'm now here. My face breaks with a bit of blue—
a bit of bruise and some rawness in the rushes.

© Mary Walker Graham 2005

P.F.S. : Three Definitions

First things first: the unavoidable, primordial question must arise: what is Neo-Romanticism? What Romanticism tends to emphasize the personal, and the idea of the autonomous artist who does things, creates, for him or herself. Or, say creation ensues to fulfill a personal wish, or power drive. It is implicit in the personal nature of Romanticism that the personal is buttressed by a sense of passion or conviction, which is also personal: the individual finds themselves seized by a passionate conviction as to the validity of personal expression. This is usually pursuant to the revelation of a personal, individualized gift, a unique talent. To make a long, cumbersome story short: the Romantic artist is supposed to, as the saying goes, *mean it*. The backbone of personal conviction and personal sincerity equips the Romantic artist to “mean it” with as much passionate intensity as can seize an individual human being. So, again to compress a long, cumbersome story, “Neo” along with “Romanticism” simply means a new group of artists who express themselves out of passionate, individualized sincerity, and with personal, individually gifted equipment. This, against the backdrop of a post-modern aesthetic landscape that demeans the individual, and, to be quizzical, “doesn’t mean it.” Post-modernity frowns on the gifted individual, and on individual conviction. Neo-Ro takes for granted that post-modern irony, impersonality, effete half-assed-ness, and auto-destruction of the history of art has grown stale, over-circumscribed, and parochial. Perhaps a bunch of gifted individuals could put some sparkle back on America’s cultural surface. That’s the presupposition.

The Creatrix, as a definable character in art, has now developed out of Neo-Romanticism. The Creatrix is a female artist who embodies the self-determination, autonomy, and complex sense of individuality which tends to manifest in Neo-Ro, and Neo-Ro creations. I am taking for granted that the Creatrix, as a definable art-character, does begin with Abby Heller-Burnham, Mary Evelyn Harju, and Jenny Kanzler. What distinguishes the Creatrix from post-modern female, and feminist, archetypes, is a sense of Eros, or the erotic, developed itself to an extreme pitch of *intensity*. This, even in Kanzler, where this development is stunted or warped into mutant form. The sense of the

erotic is grasped, felt, and registered with emotions consonant with an integration not found in post-modernity: straightforward passion, straightforward longing, straightforward physical need, conveyed in a fashion which does not need to abuse the viewer with the dull, dispossessed ironies which have now become a post-modern tradition. Why Eros in American art can be made new now, especially with Heller-Burnham's immersion in queer life, is that Eros in American art has never had formal parameters imposed on it, by painters who are not merely servants, but masters, of formality, on a level with classicist Europe. This is not to say that the Creatrix has to be a painter. But, if we are to start with Heller-Burnham, Harju, and Kanzler as initial archetypes, these are some reference points which might be of service to us, in an effort not to be strained by an atmosphere in which narratives of form, and narratives of passion, are disavowed.

At the beginning of the Aughts in Philadelphia, I attempted to found an artist's co-op, to stage multi-media art events around Philadelphia. I called the first co-op This Charming Lab. It met with limited success. By the middle of the Aughts, the situation had ripened. I now had the man power and venues to stage the events I wanted to stage, which would involve multi-media, around ideas and interpretations of Artaud, the Theater of Cruelty, and what could be made of Artaudian spectacle with the resources at hand. My essential partnership in the initial-model Philly Free School was with three fellow artists: Mike Land, Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum, and Nick Gruberg. Matthew Stevenson and Hannah Miller also proved to be invaluable. Abby Heller-Burnham, Mary Evelyn Harju, and Jenny Kanzler all contributed as tangent artists. As of the early Teens, I began to use Philly Free School as a moniker employed to cover my entire cultural life in Aughts Philadelphia. This created a context for Abby, Mary, and Jenny to be representatively Free School artists, as well. Not to mention, those who had participated in Free School events in Chicago and New York, and everyone who had been published in Philly Free School Post (P.F.S. Post). Why Philly Free School acts as a correlative to Neo-Romanticism and the Creatrix is that it is, to be obvious, based in Philadelphia. On a less obvious note, "Free" and "School" together are meant to imply a group of artists on a vision quest, past the confines of post-modernity, multi-culturalism, and academic feminism, to learn what keys will turn what locks where so as to establish a maximum sense of residency in the most spacious, loft-like socio-aesthetic, socio-sexual, and generally socio-cultural rooms; to know, if it will be known, the boundless. Then, to begin to define the formal parameters of boundlessness in art, if they can or will be defined. And not bypass the imperative to understand what might be boundless in human life and thought, too.

More from P.F.S. Post

GENIUS LOCI

West Philly swung, night by night, around all of us.

I couldn't not notice— Diana was delicately gorgeous.

She spent lots of time in the room next door.
One night, deep into the wee hours, & as
the entire house tripped (taken off, it
seemed, into distant universes, sucked into
black holes, or even flipped the switch into
primordial ooze & chaos), I swung dumbly
into Kevin's open door, found Diana tripping
on the bed, in tee & panties. As I sat down
on the bed, all that occurred to me was to
follow my instincts. The *genius loci* of that
place & time was all about nothing else, &
the sense that Diana, whose elegant lashes

& sculpted cheekbones belied her wildness,
existed as an archetype I came to worship
at the shrine of, even as music roared from
down the wood-floored hall, Mary & Abby
slept on the other side. I ascertained, later,
Diana, who I hadn't known before, had changed
her name, to stake a claim, against missing other ladies'
fun. She would become an arriviste for me, later,
also, once the two stalwarts were out of the way.
Hopefully, foggy memories would make me hesitant
to claim knowledge, more than stunted, of her
bellicose, venom-bordered insides, of a stunted child,
Lolita as painted by Goya. Lolita painted by Goya,
however, is still Lolita. Nothing child-like in that wildness.

© Adam Fieled 2025

From *Caffeine Destiny*

THE PAPER HOUSE

At the edge of the field, we see the angriest bodies.

The spell is in the wrists, the shampoo— girls with long throats and a penchant for divining rods. In
the end, the house burns beneath the moon opening like a mouth torn out of a book. All our rooms
have wants, *our* wants— broken doors. We smolder beneath dresses, our buttons, our brocade dark.

Even now, the mice shred newspapers in attics filled with cages ripped from hooks in parlor walls, in parlors ripped from a woman's skin, all eyelets and hooks.

At the edge of the field, we watch with matches in our skirts.

© Kristy Bowen 2006

.....



ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

From *P.F.S. Post*

ON THE BANKS OF THE RIVER IN WINTER

So many Marys grieving by the river
that I have to cover my ears
to shut out the sobbing and hear,

as if for the first time,
the long low sound of the water
and the train just beginning

to round the bend and blow
its way through the dark tunnel.
How many times I've sat

in summer: considered the chicory,
drawn the blue bridge flung
from bank to bank, or wondered

the names of the red flowers,
their throats like trumpets.
How many times I've not

given in to the weeping:
I can almost see her— the one
who lifts the Potomac mud

to her face and smears,
as if it were a balm and not
the original problem,

Poems

From *P.F.S. Post*

Adam Fieled
(Plymouth
Meeting,
Pennsylvania,
USA):...

More from Ocho #11

From Ocho #11

From No Tell Motel

More from Dusie

From Dusie

Ephemera:
beginning the
work

From The
Brownstone
Review

More from Columbia
Poetry Review

Return to

Art Recess



or the one with the bucket of fish:
she should return them but that would mean
letting them slip, silver and whole,

finally cast out. I'd rather
let them wander in the maples,
cold and insistent and crying.

I should swim somehow— wait
for spring; I've been waving
to that other a long time,

the one who wears the red
and not the blue scarf.

© Mary Walker Graham 2008

From Sharkforum

TROUBLE

The girls you love make beautiful suicides,
breaking off heels, losing orchid
corsages beneath backseats of Buicks.

This one speaks through the curtain
of her hair— the sweet blonde number,
soft machine of her ribs humming,

an engine block full of bees.
The dark has too much rigging. The moon,
projected on a screen with tinfoil stars,

is full of holes. Bankrupt gas stations,
the backs of women's calves.
Your flares set fire to the homecoming float,

the gym and all its paper carnations—

mouths gone metallic pink
harbor tire irons, rhinestone tiaras.

© Kristy Bowen 2007

From *Dusie*

SYSTEMS

Arielle, whose name means *lion of god*, says to write messy poems. *You know you're there when the poem really makes you worry*. I worry over car wrecks and falling in the shower. Crying on buses and wearing bad shoes. I try to write a poem I wouldn't want to sleep with. Would kick to the curb, wrap my thumbs around her slender neck and snap. This one's still babied, blinking, wondering if it wants to be a skirt or a tire iron. Licking the perimeter of opened envelopes for a tiny bit of sweet.

My nouns go awry every time I stop paying attention. Fall pretty like dimes on the sidewalk. My friend Melissa, whose name means *bee-like*, has a theory about systems. For every change in variable, the outcome shifts toward constant decay.

On Thursday, I wear a red ribbon around my throat and am capable of the most serious damage. Wash my hair with beer and make paperclip chains, while he fucks someone else. A Katherine, whose name means *torture*. Who hangs out in wine bars and yoga studios and calls at 3am. Her syllables click like a bicycle tire, a pack of cards.

© Kristy Bowen 2007



ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

From *Great Works*

PROGRESS POEM #1803: THE LADS

super kings, disco-lighted
black-bilious cud-boys
of inhouse take-aways
under ceiling rashed,
random shifted
rainbow rays.
doof doof — lager
glass dinked joke —
mushroom swollen
in through the thumbs
up door: boy on crutches
to the round of applause bar.
check shirt kisses,
pink shirt too close to the lips
all slows, pre-fight:

complete 3-sixty of the mobile
in the palm, shot downed in the thumb-thimble,
message in lipstick smeared across glass,
awake in the *is it still yesterday*

© Chris McCabe 2005

Adam Fieled (Logan Square, Philadelphia, USA): "Twisted Limbs"

Apocalypse out there. Here, endless wheels,
sparks; pockets of restrained & segmented
light. Lovely ways you defy me. Best moments,
always, you on top, when the world ends a little
bit. Warmth between lovers can never be
unnatural. Nor can hostage-taking, or a healthy
regard for oblivion. It's all that's left in common
between us & them: twisted limbs. Our mouths
move like theirs: flips, bites. Our movements
prefigure the same ends: consummated peace,
mediated silence, "deliberate hebetude." We're
w/ them as a necessary antithesis. They can't
see us. They never could. It's left to us to make
a balance, if we can. We'll need nothing less than luck.

© Adam Fieled 2006-2025

Earlier versions of this piece appeared in *Big Bridge* and *Melancholia's Tremulous Dreadlocks*

From *X-Peri*

ANTON CHEKHOV SHORT STORY POEM

A car runs on desire. Don't
let them tell you otherwise. When
you have the slightest memory, which
fits into your head like an oyster in
its shell, don't expect much more.
And the people you meet fit
neatly into two categories. Some are
ripe and some are green as June.

© Larry Sawyer 2016

From *Pirene's Fountain*

EMILY BRONTE

these windy slopes are shorn
of the things which make life comfortable:
broad trees, broken bread, the swell

and supple curve of a lover's back.
I sit here by my window, catch
the rough, sweet scent of heather in my nostrils

and write of death and love entwined
like adders together. The poetry
lies wild in my veins, the poetry

of granite skies stabbed by rocky outcrops,
the giving spring of turf, the taste
of solitude like aloes on my tongue,

the bare, unchanging moors, which take
my sisters and myself with mute indifference
and conquer under soil all our passion.

© Alison Croggon 1991

From Sawbuck Poetry

DEAR EVIL

Landlady: when you fixed my roof, it leaked two weeks later. January was warm this year. I don't care what you say, I only had one "beer party." It was the goddamned Fourth of July. No, you can't have my goldfish tumblers. No, you cannot buy them. When I was mugged outside the building, you charged me to change the locks—

© Brandi Homan 2007

From Coconut

SENTENCE

I close my eyes and in one senseless jump
embrace my new found love, the zero ground
of unprotected feet, sumptuous
singular, lonely, flight. The very last sound
I hear is a hum, or ringing, calling me back
from this strange pre-conscious state. I awake
to be gripped by a cardiac
terror, breathless and sweating I try to wake
you, you heavy with your own dark trouble
and regardless, yet not uncaring, of me
here beside you, the cunning double
of a lover who wishes to be free.

But as the trap-door in the scaffold floor
needs the feet of the condemned to swindle,
so too do you need me, before
argument and after excess, all unhinged
at the threat that you might withdraw
and leave me, who forsook my liberty
that I might smell your hair, hanging withal.
Answered by silence I refused to be,
though I'm the condemned you'll answer me—
in verse at least, as my pen, if not my heart,
knows you, and knows that you will say to me:
you're the door, dear, the condemned is my part.

© Jennifer Moxley 2006

More from *Wicked Alice*

SAINT MONICA OF THE GAUZE

The room is red with iodine. Her ears stop
and her thighs slacken against
the bed. The owls would like to unwrap

her, as owls do, always looking
for the next loose shutter, the goldfinch
bathing in a pile of spilled parmesan

in the convenience store parking lot.
She explains a few things. Static
wracks the telephone line, a dry tornado

on the helipad after a freeway crash.
The linoleum has seen years of other feet
and beds rolling in and out, how

they hauled her from the gurney as if
she weighed something other
than what was left. They ask: *but what*

*about your Cleveland flowering pear
trees, or the creeping vinca, the clematis
your husband promised to burn if it*

came back? They say that she will get out.
There will be time and muscle
enough for hanging wet towels on a line.

© Mary Biddinger 2007

Adam Field (West Philadelphia, USA): "On Love"

What tide is the realest, which pulls in a kiss?
The rigor of reaching the thing-in-itself,
from subject to object, chaos to bliss,
our frail intuition of heavenly health?
Our love is not molecules, dumbly colliding,
nor is it knowledge, formal and static,
nor is it accident, reasoned and plumbed—
it's real, meta-rational, soaring and gliding,
felt like an earthquake, bringing up panic,
taking our parts and achieving a sum.

The greater part of love is sacrifice—
flesh intermingled, tensing (push!) tingled,
this is the secret I learn from your eyes.

Giving my body, knotted, single,
tiny eruptions that come from my tongue;
plunging down surfaces, slicking the flesh,
thoughtless as leopards or hurricane winds—
watching you shudder, watching you come,
rapt in the throes of an innocent death,
giving my life to an inch of your skin.

Thus, we trade in secure oblivion
for reckless reality, messy and fleeting.
Such is the cosmos— creation, carrion,
motions of molecules merging and meeting.
Nothing is lost but notions of self-ness,
hard ideations that close and clatter,
rages of ego that strain at their walls—
nothing is gained but a sense of the deathless,
"there-ness" of spirit, "there-ness" of matter,
ultimate "there-ness" that scares as it calls.

© Adam Fieled 2003-2025

originally published in Hinge Online

From *Wicked Alice*

THIRD NIPPLE REMOVAL

She froze the violets in liquid nitrogen.
She lifted her frock, tried to place
a penny over the blinking eye.

A crash. Some variations of purple.
One of the ceramic swan planters
let out a rusty nailed sigh. She sewed

on a swatch of key-scraped uterus.
She distributed the Vicodin. She disputed
the license allegations. She loved.

From Milk Magazine

the syn-aesthete's love poem

And yesterday, blue tasted like licorice.
Even the wind chimes caused dizziness;
the ache of paper lanterns rotting
from the acacias. Perhaps the L in my name
makes you sad, evokes a film where a woman waves
from a train. Or how this horizon wants to be a hymn.
If you listen, you can hear the holes in the alphabet,
the sounds lit by the lamps of our bones.
Perhaps with this page I could fashion a boat
or a very convincing window—
a dress made entirely of vowels.

© Kristy Bowen 2005

From Pirene's Fountain

SEDUCTION POEM

I want the slew of muscle, a less
cerebral meeting place: no word
but your male shout, the shirred
unpublic face and honest skin
crying to me, yes,
the mouthless, eyeless tenderness
crying to be let in.

Unbutton all your weight, like a bird
flying the night's starred nakedness:
put down your grammatical tongue, undress
your correct and social skin:
come white and absurd,

all your language one word
crying to be let in.

© Alison Croggon 2003

More from diode

thicket

I am all butter cream and lace when
we abandon this house for another
with a picket fence and a tiny door.
Clandestine, destined
to have too many holes we can't fill.
Despite the flurry of hands, we are drowsy,
playing cards and fucking in the afternoon.
Holding our nostalgia like a cake knife.

Soon, we abandon this car for another
with a blue lush interior that smells like Winstons.
I make a flip book out of our indiscretions'
misspellings. Finger the upholstery
while we play roulette with beer bottles.
Kiss me, kiss me not.
My hope all parade floats and dancing bears
until I split the infinitives,
spill the milk, slit the window screens.
Go for the jugular.

My sleep is still white, all paper and milk.
Counting the cracks in the ceiling,
dividing three and three and three.
Outside the amaryllis is ridiculous,
lewdly red and unruly.
I am counting spiders in the eaves as you leave.
One and one and one.

© Kristy Bowen 2010

From *diode*

PROMISE RING

When the horror materialized, I was noodling
with my boots on, waiving everyone's
signature. Since then, I know I have arrived

with keys where the fingers ought
to waggle but teenagers do not enter
into it. I didn't want this way back when

I was mean. It is an accordion effort
just to breathe with you, to align snouts
and buttons and not jump to conclusions.
On the idiot box a woman in poltergeist

drag; all my instincts chew out
of me like field mice. I thump the cushion
like a professional but can't tell

where the hawk will land. Crook
of your consciousness, funny bone
splintering danger in

the dog's soft palate. Cool as a bowl
of anti-freeze that holds
still the moon's reflection.

© Jen Tynes 2010

Adam Fieled (Gulph Mills, Pennsylvania): "Basement: Philadelphia Museum of Art: Summer 1996"

for Ernestine Rubin

Art, it would seem, is a nice way of
saying that everything resides in hell—
the pictures are anguish— the negatives,
hiding somewhere, ecstasy.

Pictures mounted on plain grey walls.
Slow viewers puzzle themselves; sashay,
bug-like, into corners. I am not,
unfortunately, basking in the open glow of
abundant creativity, but am thrashed
by a sense of impotence. How do I
let the images in? The blonde over
there: does she do penance by giving
head? Fractions, pinpoints of light distill
from low ceiling— footsteps, cacophony
of breaths being drawn. Eyes of an
artist, mine of a bloodhound. Staid types sniff the walls.

Art, it would seem, is
a nice way of saying that everyone
resides in hell— the people are anguish—
the angels, hiding somewhere, ecstasy.

© Adam Fieled 1996

From moria poetry

SINGING IN CHORUS

This is departing from original intent—
at home, a towel warms slowly on the rack.
I want to say: *can't study the human hand,*
can't touch, can't feel. Can't hear the distorted
raging of each self for human love. Can't.
Give me your hand, press mine.

There is no end to living, nor the sudden
breaking like waves on the distant fortress. . .
I'm gonna put on that starry crown—

down by the riverside
down by the riverside
down by the riverside

I go to meet the windows in the chorus room, unfolding—
the motive clock of selves.

© Simon Dedeo 2007

Poems

From No Tell Motel

More from Dusie

From Dusie

Ephemera:

beginning the
work

From The

Brownstone
Review

More from Columbia

Poetry Review

Adam Fieled (editor,

Plymouth

Meeting,

Pennsylvani...

From Tears in the

Fence 60

From X-Peri

From Columbia

Poetry Review 13

Return to

Art Recess





ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

From *Ekleksographia*

SOMETHING MAYBE

The curve of my spine *bent*,
along subway lines. The only thing
that makes sense is to lie down
on the sidewalk right now,
beer can crushed & tossed across
the street. We're not going to make it.
For an entire summer my life's
solution was to not leave
my bed. A thousand miles later
& I still want something else,
shifty and shifting away from the center.
It's clear now: we were never
going to make it. The darkness creeps
over, smears in the rain. The end
of the night means leaving the bar,
myself keeping myself in check.
Sometimes I want to go back
& do things differently,
but this is one fuck-up I can't take
back. *Pink Moon. Pink Moon. Pink Moon. Pink Moon.*
Hit play again. Lying in bed, feeling
the darkness creep over.
Let the weird back in. Find a point
in the distance, fast and furious,
something worth racing off to.
I'm looking for something new,
something catchy, something

to fall asleep to.

© Gina Myers 2009

More from Ocho #11

WHITE SESTINA

Again, they've tricked me out of bed
with the rumor of sight. No casual joke.
It seems they didn't know what they were doing,
as if this dawn of rose and of white
were the gist of some other problem they were working
on. I am up now, and seething

with expectation. How I am seething
that the vision filtered through, and on my bed
stood, for a sweet second, the pilot working
its craft down to its pad, like a joke
which promised to be innocently white
discovered, in the end, to be something doing—

and though I wish I were doing
pet tricks, like a hound who can't stop seething,
espying through the brush notes of white
(a brand new car, or pillow for its bed)
I am rarely ever in on it, when the joke
escapes into the higher lights, like a clock never working.

But I am working. I am working,
listening to what the repair man's doing
to the faucet upstairs, and when a joke
falls from his lips, like a bubble from a trepanned seething,
I recoil like a child in its bed
taking notes, but protecting its fairly white

neck, wanting to keep it white. White,
the clouds want to show they're working,
but I take it they need not lift my bed

to rise to the stars, to explain what they're doing
so many weeks on the ground, the forum seething
with suspicion, that the mission be some sort of joke—

and, someday, we will just joke
about it, Aeneas. But say this to him, *white*
is the cloud, like a bang, and the working
a fairer standard to satisfy the seething.
Sure, it is clear there is something doing.
So lie down here, next to me, in my bed.

For the bed is the joke
doing lines before the judges, who are white
with pride and indignation: seething, working—

© Brian Kim Stefans 2007

From *Ocho* #11

DOUBLE

Here is a box of fish marked tragedy.
Is it different from the dream

in which your alter ego kills the girl?
You are the same, and everyone knows it,

whether tracing the delicate lip of the oyster shell,
or sharpening your blade in the train car.

The marvelous glint is the same.
Though you think you sleep, you wake

and walk into the hospital, fingering
each instrument, opening each case with care.

The scales fall away with a scraping motion.
You are the surgeon and you are the girl.

Whether you lie like feathers on the pavement,
or coolly pocket your equipment, and walk away...

You are the same; and you are the same.
You only sleep to enter the luminous cave.

© Mary Walker Graham 2007

From Spar

WINTER ABSTRACT

Call me no one, candle abandoned.
From black lots, black columns, dimensions,
scattering wind. It's been a long time here,
the reflected essences of backyards,
photos freezing in your past. And less. And less.
Wouldn't promise but I swore,
love, adventure,
kept the best of our fractured animus,
when you close the door on your nurture—
cure on ice— the most protected picture
once radical, now quest. Dear heathen,
your magnet is nomad, do not ask
for more malignant fires, benigner poles—

© Karen Volkman 2002

Adam Fieled (Logan Square, Philadelphia, USA): "Technician of Tough Love"

for Alexandra Grilikhes 1932-2003

Puzzling your way back from nothingness
you must be; if the Void is an abyss,
to conquer it in life is impossible.
There is a blessing in ritual,
but it is all from one pull.

Your private treasures I never knew;
beyond the Indian drums (of which you had
a collection), was there something,
some book, some record, you prized
above all others?

You were a technician of tough love,
collected hearts; had a passion
for Chinese herbs boiled down
to the root, to retrieve essential,
healing strength;

ministered weary angels
needing succor, familiar w/ your tongue,
your breath, the beating of your heart.
Saintly, to feed some soul's need
for flesh, nectar, sanctuary,
oblivion;

now it's death's mystery
from which you can't escape—
maybe. I profess & confess
utter bewilderment.

Remember lunches
at Essene, 4th Street, the crutch
of good caffeinated coffee, conversation,
a few hours rest; was eternity
there, watching you, your Muse,
waiting silently to bear Her naked flanks
to your disciplined pleasure?
Who would know but Her
how you, a restless spirit, learned?

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More from moria poetry

from *The Frequencies*

96.7

Call it another rhetorical device to recreate the century's slipping music, but the crowd still won't let me in, even though I undid the drummers with a joke, easing the lingering tension in a light bulb filled with moth shells. It's moving in step with the city, something like a petting zoo & everything becomes public eventually. Because there was an ad in the paper for a job just like mine, I couldn't help but bruise the downtime, rubbing the pelt the wrong way. What purrs inside the city? Inside fields of corn & wheat, tobacco & rum, trying to focus the rays since colors could add to it, edged in by the airwaves, tumbling from the towers, the music that slips, that follows us like fallout. The bleachers were crumbling beyond the buzzing wires. Beyond is a thinning crowd. If I put my back to the radio, it doesn't mean I'm not listening. It means I just want to belong.

© Noah Eli Gordon 2003

From *moria poetry*

STELLAR MAGNETISM

I will meet you,
when we are both of the dark.
Proxima Centauri. In lifetimes.
A meeting. Travel.
Elephants. Rearranging stars.
We will meet.
The speed. The speed of the dark.
Avoiding elephants. Speeding.
Closest sun. Galaxies. Away. The heat
travels through spirals, milky way
lightning— dust to dust.
How much more dispersed can one get.
Becoming dust. We meet.

© Carrie Hunter 2002

More from *No Tell Motel*

I feel like a mother when I wear
someone else's shoes, tie someone else's
laces into rabbits' feet in darkness
on the front stairs at dawn, wait
for the mailman to come & rub
my heels together til we're home. I feel
like a mother talking loudly around
young boys & their fragrant tufts
of armpit hair on the subway, & I rev my
engine on the highway, & when I'm not behind
the wheel making horn noises with my
nose & mouth, I feel like a mother
who has forgotten how to breathe water,
insisting that everyone ought to be breathing
air by now. I feel like my mother
is dead although it hasn't happened
yet that I feel like a motherless child. I
feel like a mother when I make a list of names
that calls all my enemies out & I post the list
on a grocery store bulletin board (T's
all crossed as ugly moustaches), I feel like a mother
when I shave my beard and all my children tiptoe
around the kitchen sink giggling
& swinging from their blades,
when I am offered glasses of wine
without pieces of bread
soaking in them, when I transmit my own
signals from antennas, from a jar
in the earth to a cage full of animals
in the living room. I feel like
cooking those books for you, but that
isn't love, that's history.

© Jen Tynes 2008

from *No Tell Motel*

harm

Soon, the objects nearest the house begin to crumple like bows, putting back their shapes. They sing the dead from their drawers, the white from our sheets. Soon, even the cats won't sleep. Night, a girl falling through trees. A chair fastened to the floor. Before the wreck, I wore a checked dress and talked about poison: *deux ex machina*. My hair medicinal, written. Bloodstains where he looked for me on the car seat, the white sheets. He looked for me with the kitchen knife, trampling the azaleas. The devil in me swooned in the root cellar, where I tried to keep him, couldn't feed him. He sang the town to ruins. Sewed the sky into a slit.

© Kristy Bowen 2008

Adam Fieled (State College, Pennsylvania): "Song for Genevieve"

Flip-flop her legs (so soon!) are perfect
Sunlight burnishes her kneecaps
She's a swan of smoothness
A mint to be dissolved in (strong!) tea
An oyster to be de-pearled w/ two hands

(Yawning
gape
of coagulated
sunset—

Perpetual cricket
buzz sticks
to pure ancient
leaves in breezes—)

She's poignant, pained, church-stained
Gravy-lust, the merchandise of sailors (tides!)
Orally injected (wet!) anti-depressants
You're killing me (Hepburning my body!)
Spread a flag over yr naked back, arch—
over the wall— push!— over the sky;
Stars, planets, universes yarned in a spin;
Navigate the (gated!) grave of the Milky Way;
Eat the chocolate donut of midnight—

© Adam Fieled 1998

originally appeared in hutt and Starfish

from *Borrowed House*

FLIRTATIONS

Drunk beside the pond, we play
with ultimatums...

:if you cannot fathom this thick mud.

:if you cannot pull the legs from this daddy-long.

*:if you cannot stew this prepubescent carrot
in your own blood.*

:if you cannot hitch the butterfly with your sugared thumb.

*:if you cannot look me in the eye
when you recite*

the filthiest passage in the grassiest language.

© Brooklyn Copeland 2008

from *nomina*

Spring's portion, a sweet sifting.
Aggregate spirit, portent or part
a limbic texture, textured heart
effacing the product of its lifting

white conduction in the bolus of a drifting,
as if. As of, apprised, apart,

it really was. It really hurt.
A game ago, a seismic shifting,

a few blocks back, blacked out. Broke in.
Backed off. Spoke more, in wish, said less.
Said this, sad such. Or some dumb grin

encrypted in the crude protection.
Abed a blue bent, dead bless,
the brutal of the person we'd have been.

© Karen Volkman 2008

Poems

From Dusie

Ephemera:

beginning the
work

From The

Brownstone

Review

More from Columbia

Poetry Review

Adam Fieled (editor,

Plymouth

Meeting,

Pennsylvani...

From Tears in the

Fence 60

From X-Peri

From Columbia

Poetry Review 13

From Otoliths

From Poetry

Return to





ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

From *Otoliths*

LOVE

I told them, you can take half the conversation
away from a stranger without them ever knowing

it, take the real side away, and then turn it
into that place, that day that never happened

to you, some intended thought, now yours. There,
you will have it for years, or because of the excitement

that will no doubt accompany this treasure, the night
will come when, not alone to repeat it only to yourself,

perhaps, lying down in a close but uncomfortable
position, faced with a person equally as exciting (in

their own way) as what you've heard, you will tell
them this side of things, so they can stare at you

as you tell it. And afterwards, before falling asleep
near them, they will tell you, *I know, I was there.*

© Jordan Stempleman 2007

From *Scantily Clad Press*

KATE

She was cat-eyed and turtlenecked,
flicking her kretek over a pop-can,
shale bangles jangling like so many
airport tambourines. She was fur-
tongued and blurry-worded, wobbly
on her ankles, top-heavy and *moue*-mouthed,
powder-nosed and sloppy, bursting from
her barstool like a weasel from a mulberry
bush. Her teeth were rows of ice in a tray;
her poems Rorschach blots on a page.
And the stick-fig-faux-scoliosis pose?
Stage-wise, she had one of those,
and she worked it like any blank-faced waif
in shredded runway clothes. In crowds
she laughed alone. Her soul was lost but
her cry had heart, and when she asked we fell
apart and spotted her the dough. Which she
probably blew on blow. And that's the last we knew of Kate.

© Brooklyn Copeland 2008

Equations: Thesis: Heather Mullen

Heather is easily misinterpreted. She goes to bed with me for complex reasons: because she has pity for this underling artist, who tries so hard to be recognized; because this underling artist gives her treats (a public forum for her own underling art); because she finds him hard to resist after a few drinks; and because, lo and behold, she is genuinely aroused by what happens when these things are investigated. I don't have many interpretations of Heather; she's average height, average weight, a face more handsome than beguilingly pretty (sort of a WASP Frida Kahlo, heavy eyebrows, thick lips, dark hair that rides her head in waves). But what happens in bed is so climactic that it takes us beyond our self-serving interpretations. This is a woman who gives; every inch of her is covered in desire, which can (and must) be fulfilled. Heather likes sex more than any other woman I've slept with. She screams, bites, moans, and there is such a delicious fluidity to her movements that, despite her near-homeliness, I am moved to do the same thing. Heather is teaching me how rare it is to find a partner who loves these processes, who makes sex a manifestation of spiritual generosity. We're both almost thirty; I've never seen someone who contains both the generosity and the sense of comfort Heather has in the physical act.

In this favorite game, and when youth is involved, women often hold the cards. Heather has decided that we will have two nights, no more. There is something in me that wants and needs her too much. She is too touched, too moved. It's safer just to flush the thing. I don't particularly realize this, as we sit at the Cherry Street Tavern. All I know is an anxious feeling that I'm going on a trip and Heather is giving me a warm goodbye. It is a trip involving my art and my sense is that I'm going to get killed. Heather, she knows privately, is about to kill me too. She puts in her diaphragm and when I come, it is an exquisite lunge into some variant of heaven. Her intake of breath tells me that she is getting my stream. She might even be frightened that the diaphragm is punctured. Amidst all the peace and its benignity is the sense that things are getting out of hand. This is unsanctioned intercourse, out of mutual dependence; Heather feels this too much. So that, when I get back from my ten days in New England (where I have, in fact, been killed), Heather is nowhere to be found. That part of her that took my streams is loathe to take any more, too happy, too at peace. I learn that Heather represents that great portion of humanity that wants to be in pain. Ecstasy is a dead end street; it is too unreliable, too jumpy. Heather now goes for guys that give her the manner and form of the pain she wants, and not too much of the nice stuff.

© Adam Fieled 2011-2023

From *P.F.S. Post*

MEMOIR

I willed the knife to hit the mark and it did,
sometimes at the point, and stuck. Practice led
to skill, until my eyes were covered with a handker-
chief and my beloved straddled a wheel
for all to see as I threw at her but hit
the space between her legs, beside her head,
beneath her arms. This was it, all
or nothing: my life and hers in a perfect art,
where every night she was reprieved for having
lived, and I was kissed as she was freed,
as part of the act that traveled the country and built
my fame as the man who misses with perfect aim.

© Chard deNiord 2007

From *Dusie Press*

To Bill Allegrezza, after reading *In the Weaver's Valley*

"I" must climb up
from a whirlpool
swirling down,
but sans belief
in signification.

"I" must say I
w/ out knowing
how or why
this can happen
in language.

"I" must believe
in my own
existence,
droplets stopping
my mouth—

alone, derelict,
"I" must come back,
again, again,
'til this emptiness
is known, & shown.

© Adam Fieled 2007

More from *X-Peri*

LIFE SCRIPT

Born *Cuckoo*, *Technical*
I became a *Vagabond*, *Condensed*.
She was très *Avantgarde*,
always the *Jester*.
Our relationship *Allegro*.
We vacation in *Geneva*.

Our life *Storybook*.
Our son *Tristan*, of course.
How *Poetica*.

© Larry Sawyer 2016

More from *P.F.S. Post*

AN EVENT

i
above
me

though a beginning
a way through

still we corner direction
with beacons thrown
into night

a goal or a sight

we could wait for an event
with fingers shifting among the goods on a table
but i prefer the multiple act—
the digressive broken word changing in space.

four parts falling
that was how i came to see it
what's happened is
the spirits take hold
and then thrust us out into
the brilliance of a day on its end
as though only thought
can remake the system in
clean lines in frequent
violent reverberations of sound

that remind us of battles
of hinges raised for a moment
in the sun.

A SWITCH

the beam flashes and is
gone

dreams crumble with bickering groups gathered

"she stops before babylon and goes invisible"

i gage my strength
against rock
as wind playing
lone sounds

idle but understanding
immensity is overcoming
light drives but allows

"i am years for you just now"

© William Allegrezza 2007

From *P.F.S. Post*

9/1/07
to Helene

There's a green dustcover over every place
that seems worth going back to, piled
by thinking, candy-apple tart.
You've just begun your trip around
the map of where you are when some
remembered patchwork drops on top of it,
catching every hook with an eye
that glances homeward. Don't tell us how

you've always wanted this to be
your starring role. Cast
off your energetic plush
and wrap one callback finger
around each ornament.
That's when you'll really know
how wishes rise like buried
grains of rice or bread-loaf,
juttings into marked-off space,
nodding spring-loaded heads along
to this defeated beat.

© Timothy Yu 2007

From *Ungovernable Press*

Mariehamn

Your ukulele. Just because I could not play.
By sleight of wave our names are forever erased
from the sand. By sleight of hand
your card is pulled, melts, seamless,
and our dainty pastel admittance seizes
the moment of gentle tumult to burrow maybe
beyond the discard pile: beyond my boggled-sight?
Beyond my fire-fingered grasp?
For my love is a painted hermit crab,
yours for a good cry...

The sea, the sea will provide.
This evening,
there will be intrigue
while our clothes tumble dry.

© Brooklyn Copeland 2009

From *Words Dance*

GENERIC STRUGGLE

It's sort of a horror—
ashes in the mouth, fish subsisting
on mud—
hypothetical fringes, camps, camps
of cracks where real humans slip...

Homeless, here on the last frontier
there's room enough for millions
to live out of a car, pitch a tent, grow
up in a dark texture of thatch.

To taste the stale odor of resources drying,
to breathe that exhaust
is to suddenly find yourself another
bottle-tossed boat person
washing, washing...

I'm inside that knife
experiencing the exposed belly's
sensations, and what pierces, and when.

It's the heart of a photo of three women
weeping over some body shot down.

Madonnas aren't myths. Truly, martyrs feel:
grief, the black garb, not a symbol simply,
but more a face wrinkled expressive with
gestures, of having stolen sights gelling
as dreams at the edges of breathing, of breath.

Is to lose them to harden, become brittle,
hollow, a shell of straw
whistling in the breeze?

Down at the bowels of featureless dots on
a chart, down past the grid to a network
of sewage tunnels, the human soul's reduced
to the garble some loudspeaker blasts.

Each evening, on the airwaves, that trouble,
a roomful of mirrors, delivers the same
news.

© Stephen Mead 2005

Equations on PennSound

Equations 1: The Thesis Episodes.

Equations 2: The Jade Episodes, completing the dialectic (antithesis, synthesis) & book.

Equations: Thesis: Julie Hayes

Time and sex: sex chronology is not linear. Sex and time are both conversant with strange leaps. It is the first day of the first class I will ever teach. Julie looks at me with big round black eyes, soulfully. She has long wavy black hair and her looks are dark, foreboding. We often want what wants us; Julie makes a habit of following me, from the classroom to the subway, from the subway to the Last Drop. As a student, she's haphazard. What she teaches me is that when someone follows you, they can make you follow them; on the walk home from the Drop, I realize my mind is following her, into her apartment, onto her bed, underneath the sheets, underneath her folds, into her little stomach. But I can't. So I let her follow me, knowing that this will lead (eventually) to a culminating moment. My hunger is for continuance. Julie wants the thrill of picking up a hot potato and dropping it back into the pot. But these early weeks are all titillation, so that every soulful look to me is the countenance of continuance, has endurance written into it. Is this my wife? Marriages have been initiated in stranger fashions. Julie is as pale as Marie, but much flintier, so I know strife will be a feature of my daily existence, after we are married. I think this as I stand before the class, discoursing on Chaucer, gazing at this little wife of Bath.

The semester is over, almost. I am making a pact with Satan to get away with this. It is all fine and feisty as I bite the bullet, walk the knife edge, get in touch with my renegade parts. But I never lose sight of the hunger for permanence, which is by no means Julie's. Her hunger is just to have what cannot be had, so that she can be a special person. Two hungers collide into nakedness, and neither seems to care that they don't coalesce. We are separate via our separate hungers, and human in our desperate need to pursue them, singularly, and only marginally together. Her apartment is a mess, but with high ceilings, who cares? So we climb into our bed of separate hungers and square off. I learn

nothing because I do not see what her hunger is. I think she's just like me. Of course, she wants what I want. Of course, she thinks, he wants what I want, to do something to make himself a special person. What neither knows is that we're both not special, we are both (and more than we realize), lusterless in our separate lusts. There is no innocence lost because raw hungers remain innocent until proven otherwise. You can pound away a hunger, but each thrust by no means puts you deeper into the other person. You move deeper into privations of private passions, unexpressed. But Julie looks so young and callow that I don't notice these things. This, I think, is the beginning; but Julie has already become a special person, and wants a way out. We both sleep topless in the May heat.

.....

Something holds Julie back so that there can't be too much of this. While I am with her, she controls everything, from my sensations to my destiny. She can bite me off, permanently cripple me, or please me if she wants. As master, she decides how much hunger she will or will not assuage. She uses her hands as well as her mouth, doing little twists like she's learned to do from Internet porn. It's delicious, my legs shake from the unbearable nature of the sensations. The problem is, she then freezes, which means she is deliberately effacing my most overwhelming pulses. So I come in her frozen, static mouth, with a sense of intense anti-climax, and I am too bashful to instruct her as to how to do this properly. Yet any woman who brings me to this must be a darling and an angel. Julie, this darling angel, stands on the threshold of womanhood, and her hunger is merely to control. There is no sense of service, and since we are in my apartment there is no sense of comfort for her. What she wants to take home with her is a sense of having bested me. As she gazes at my closed eyes and opened mouth, there is (I imagine now) a sense of bitterly held contempt for my weakness, my humanity. We never fuse our different stupidities, so that I see no depths in those rounded eyes of jet, and she knows that she has now gotten what she wants from me; there is no more specialness.

© Adam Fieled 2011

From The Argotist Online

FLOUNDERING BY THE PREACHING OF THE WORD
(Radio Edit)

I. The Bird That Never Flew

Nothing as sophisticated as a copper clip,
nothing that could be reversed, poor bird:
it was plucked at birth.

Wee bald hatchling, what chance?
What chance did it ever have?
Even the fattest, most languid cat

could've trapped it under cruel claw.

What chance? Its caged-bird song
plaintive as foghorns
strained from the Clyde's forgotten dawn,
melancholy with dull dreams
of washing days and tenement greens.

Oh dearie me. Oh me, oh my!
Puir wee chookie bird couldnae fly.

II. The Bell That Never Rang

Cracked and choked with city soot
this bell is mute,
witless in senile silence:
a belly full of bitter bile.

What use a voice as clear as cymbals
if the heart's too dark to love?
What use calling up the faithless
to hear the preaching of the word?

III. The Tree That Never Grew

This is no dear green place
but a wasteland
of broken concrete blocks,
with barbed wire strands
blowing like streamers
in the wind.

And this tree is no tree
but a petrified, withered stump,
without branches, without leaves,
its bark, frost-bled,
scored with a cross-hatch
of angry slogans.

The pope

and also, inevitably,
the queen,
and so the acronyms
of these warring tribes
grow, like fungus.

No wonder
this tree never grew.
How could anything flourish
under such leaden skies?

IV. The Fish That Never Swam

Bloody river,
bloody river of this city's undoing
with your bloody history
of shipbuilding and conquest,
of slavery and theft,
all dressed up
in the tarnished gilt
of imperial majesty:

your dereliction is a plague
visited by the gods
upon all your daughters and sons.

Syphilitic river, no wonder
no fish ever swam
in your poisonous waters.

© Dee Rimbaud 2005

Preface: *Quiddities*

Ezra Pound famously remarked that when poetry strays too far from music, it ceases to be poetry. I would like to opine, as a tangent thought to his, that when the higher arts stray too far from philosophy, they cease to be the higher arts. Philosophy, no less than literature, is a series of narratives; and that higher-end, intellectually ambitious literature should twirl and torque meaningfully around philosophical quandaries and discourses is something that English-language poetry has forgotten in the last half-century (and I mean “pure” philosophy, as differentiated from

literary theory or aesthetics). The leveling process by which no distinctions between high and low art are made, as a precondition to post-modernity's preponderance, has effaced interest in the "fundamental questions" in favor of narrow, nihilistic ironies and corrosive but intellectually superficial cultural critiques. But that, without reprising Romanticism, English language poetry can reclaim interest in pure philosophy and the crux questions of human existence, is the assumption these poems make. As such, they are angled against everything in the English language oeuvre after T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, including the array of Deconstructive, non-narrative poetics, which confuse the respective (though not completely antithetical) functions of philosophy and poetry in an excessive and demeaning alienation of the aesthetic.

How my approach differs from Eliot's is this— rather than compressing the sensory data relevant to his inquiry into succinct forms, he prefers to paint on a wide canvas. The sharp points of his piece, often expressed in axioms and aphorisms, suffer a dissipated sense of being too generalized; an intermittent chiasmus with the tactile is represented, but focus is all too often lost in digression and imprecisely motivated meanderings. Many of Eliot's axioms are, in fact, quotations (from, among others, Heraclitus and St. John of the Cross); and his Modernistic allusiveness chips away at the potential philosopher's stone of original cognition for him. The poems in *Quiddities* are compressed and formed in the manner of John Keats' Odes; not, of course, that the poems are odes, just that they are meant to convey mystery-in-brevity; and a sense, however sodden with disillusionment and despair, of enchantment. For enchantment in intellectual mystery, where English language verse is concerned, few poems but these Apparition Poems after the English Romantics will suffice. Modernism and post-modernism presented many shortcuts to a sense of engaged cognition; but the full enchantment of the depths and mysteries of the human mind and its powers of perception and discernment was not perceived or represented. Impulses which could have led to these representations were deemed too earnest, in a milieu and context which prized irony, and mistrust of any form of depth, especially subjectively maintained cognitive-affective depth, with or against impulses which could be deemed Romantic.

If *Quiddities* is not merely a reprise of Romantic impulses, it is because the mysteries the poems encompass and close on are not comforting. Wordsworth's conception of intellectual enchantment is positivist; he follows a pedagogical path to teach us, with a discrete, didactic, and circumscribed system, how to think. This is the thematic backbone of *The Prelude*, his masterpiece. Intellectual man, he informs us, can always fall back on Nature; and Nature has the capacity to endlessly replenish intellectual man. The other major Romantics offer more naïve versions of the same intermittently comforting premise; even if Byron and Keats have ways of building levels of permanent encroaching darkness into their visions, too. The intellectual enchantment in *Quiddities* ends in itself; the poems offer no system as a transcendental antidote, and nothing is endlessly replenishing in the poems except the endless montage of thought (thoughts on more thoughts). The enchantment offered by *Quiddities* is strange and (in a contradictory way) bitter; cognition has no recourse but to recur endlessly, in a sensory landscape as blasted and dystopic as the poems themselves. To circle back to Eliot again, where *Quiddities* is concerned; it is cognition over the (or a) waste land. But that the

human intellect can and should develop its own kind of narcissism, over the dictatorial narcissism of the senses, especially in America, is presupposed. The human mind is the only enchanted place with any genuine permanence for mankind; that is the key and primordial supposition here.

P.S. *Canyons Lined in Blue Waters* is another Apparition Poems related collection which encompasses *Quiddities*.

From *Tears in the Fence* 55

CITADEL (abridged)

...The parrot was left in the library
when they went down to the tunnels,
this is not the future we are talking about,
simply bombing, simply *bang bangs*.

When I see an image I see a lamp
light along a corridor called *history*
stumbling, echoes patched back
together, there's a sound.

Paintings of stick figures on the walls,
arms up— surrender or success?
There must be a finish line ahead.
A city face stares— disguised.

I know, I know— ghosts made from
diamonds will copulate before worlds end.
Anyway, they say we're winning so
shush— young ones— *shush*.

© Hannah Silva 2012

P.F.S.: *Siren's Silence*

If I am going to discuss the arts journal *Siren's Silence*, and what it meant for Philadelphia in the Nineties, one salient point needs to be made first. Most of the dramas which lit up *Siren's Silence*, both as a literary entity and as a scene, were invisible to me as a second-tier player in them. Vlad Pogorelov, Dawn Morpurgo, Lora Bloom, Christian Hand and the rest were all dramatic personalities;

moreover, the social world they inhabited was a dramatic one. I was only able to see what I saw on semester breaks and visits home from State College. What, thus, I can relate about *Siren's Silence*, is partial and fragmentary at best. Here is the narrative of what I did see: I discovered, on a semester break, an open mike night happening at Philly Java Company on 4th Street between South and Lombard in South Philadelphia in (I think it was) spring '97. I began attending the open mike night as regularly as I could. It became clear to me that the open mikes in the back room of Philly Java were there to represent the interests of a print arts journal called *Siren's Silence*, which I became a regular contributor to. It took some time going to these open mikes to begin to differentiate personalities. The first *Siren's Silence* character I noticed who made a substantial impression on me was Vladlen ("Vlad") Pogorelov.

Vlad was different. Average height, very thin, prematurely balding, very dapper, and he talked with a thick Russian accent. The material Vlad was writing, like *No. 105*, which was published in '98 in the classic chapbook *Derelict*, had much in common with the urban, gritty realism of Charles Bukowski, and I told Vlad as much. His signature poems were about whores, drugs, poverty, and drunkenness, and (oddly enough) they demonstrated an impressive formalist streak which (one would think) Bukowski would have hated. To hear Vlad recite, "The dirty whore/ takin a bath/ smokin crack/ singing songs from time to time" in his thick Russian brogue was a distinctly otherworldly experience. Vlad was the poetry editor of *Siren's Silence* at the time. Other poems he had around, like *At the Train Station*, detailed a sensibility which, if a little long on adolescent romanticism, still had a flavor of imaginative decay, artful deterioration, which made them memorable to me. Oddly, Vlad sometimes appeared at Philly Java with his mother. There was talk that he had a trust fund, or was from a rich Russian family; I was never able to find out. In the intervening years, I have found ways to tip the hat to Mr. Pogorelov; in the Virtual Pinball section of *Beams* ("Nicanor Parra/Jimmy Page/Yossarian..."), and in *Apparition Poem 509* ("on greasy days in Philadelphia...").

Lora Bloom I came to know later as the vocalist of Radio Eris, her collaboration with my own friend and future producer Matt Stevenson. Jeanine Campbell was around the Philadelphia arts scene also for many years, but we didn't make much contact; Dawn Morpurgo same. When the final issue of *Siren's Silence* was released in late '98, which featured *Clean*, I happened to be home from State College, about to shift over to Manhattan, so I went. It was at Robin's Books (pictured above), on 13th Street off of Walnut, upstairs. I had seen Vlad read that spring behind *Derelict* at Pi on South Street in South Philly again, but Vlad wasn't there. If my disappointment was overcome, it's because I found a group of pick-up friends who set me up with some free Valiums. Even more serendipitous was my encounter with Matt Stevenson, who would play such a pivotal role for all of us in the Aughts. This is the truth....you must believe me. Matt needed (for some reason) a copy of the Doors first album, and I happened to have the cassette in my pocket. I handed it over to him, and thus sealed the deal that when I returned to Philadelphia a year later, after all the Manhattan *Babel*, pieces would fall into place which could start a revolution. *Siren's Silence* advertised itself as a literary explosion; if so, the explosion cleared some crucial space (as did Jeremy's "d") for everything which followed the one century ending and the next jumping into being, from Philadelphia on out.

P.S. Worth noting that Siren's Silence stalwart Christian Hand attended Poetry Incarnation '05.

From *Siren's Silence* (Volume 2 Number 3)

BURNING DOWN

Some people are like houses
burning down. When you
tell them, *Uh, excuse me,*
but you're definitely
on fire, they say, *No,*

that's not fire— it's just
bright yellow paint. And
you go on chatting
as if it will be Tuesday

afternoon forever till you
discover your words in
a pile of ashes the wind
catches and blows
right in your face.

© Kenneth Pobo 1998

From *Siren's Silence* (Volume 2 Number 3)

GIRL IN A BOX

I'm a girl in a box, yup, that's me, here I sit seven hours a day, five days week in a chemical fog,
peering out of the windows of my glass box, my 12-by-12 crystal cage, a caged girl with a painted
porcelain face contorted in a Revlon death mask I sculpt daily from cosmetics I shoplifted from Rite-
Aid, under my cleopatra sex goddess wig that glints glossy and unreal under the neon lights where I
turn and burn into crystal, into a glass mummy who rots the minutes and hours away in the girlie zoo,
wrapped in swaddling lacy underthings, moon drunk from the bee-stings that cover my arms,
sometimes nodding but mostly awake staring at myself with mascara eyes that smolder in the mirror
and day-dreaming under the glare of the red bulb that illuminates my cell, imprisoned by the 24-hour
stare of the crimson sun that never sets and follows each orgasm I fake, a sun that mocks me as I pose

in the window where I watch each anonymous man tread the wax floors munching on candy bars or smoking cigarettes as they gawk, all of us good girl animals of Al's Triple XXX theater who smirk and tap on the windows with fat knuckles begging *choose me! choose me!* Not me. I wait, the queen bee with my dope-sick patience, well-trained, house broken, my mirror me watching, freezing into a wicked wicked witch baby, a white-trash ice-queen, eyeing Dee-dee, the fake redhead cokehead in the booth across from me with basilick eyes as she strikes her syphilitic supermodel pose from better and younger days, beckoning with her yen sigh and spacey eyes, her rolls of fat becoming lazy, voluptuous as she wraps her boa around herself taut like a telephone wire, communicating something nobody will ever hear.

SLAM! the metal door bangs shut on the other side of my box, Italian shoes scuffling on the floor of my crypt, knocking on the window. He chose me. I hear him cursing, fiddling in frustration with the money box in the darkened chamber, shoving a deuce up the slot of the little black box on the other side of the confessional, this little black electronic box that bleeps *SESSION* and devours the dollars of the hard-working American men, the harvest of truckers and mobsters and lawyers, swallows up all the capitalist secrets and lies of the young white punks, the middle-aged black guys with their SSI checks, the ancient Asian men who tremble when they cum, the cool-ass, cracked Latino men, and your occasional slobbering drunken yuppie couple, in one greedy, democratic gulp, because this is America, dammit, and we're all free to exploit ourselves as long as we don't step on somebody else's turf, but the shutter is sliding up and so much for politics because there he is, standing there, middle-aged causoid knight with thinning hair, big nose and pervert glasses that hide his x-ray eyes that burn through the glass wall that separates us, his hands stuffed in a green L.L. Bean jacket that his wife probably got him last christmas, trying to smile but obviously scared shitless of me, the whore, flicking my smoke and dropping dirty glitter on the palace floor and believe it or not I'm actually feeling a little sorry for this poor schmuck, this burn-out insurance salesman type who stands there looking a little dumb and a little fat at me, his slum queen, slumming it up at Al's on this beautiful sunny afternoon.

© Jeanine Campbell 1998

From *X-Peri*

bottoms

a line has two sides
as hand, as work, as beam
without which I have
no line to follow,
so i
stay

hoping for direction from words
thrown up as down,
as cursive on water where
i hope to stand
but do not.

in sinking i could ask
for help, but i am
curious about the
dark shapes moving
below me.

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From *P.F.S. Post*

TO ROOSEVELT

It is with the voice of the Bible, or the verse of Walt Whitman
that I advance upon you now, Hunter!
You are primitive and modern, sensible and complicated,
with something of Washington and a dash of Nimrod.
You are the United States,
you are the future invader
of all that's innocent in America and its Indian blood,
blood that still says Jesus Christ and speaks in Spanish.

You are a superb and strapping specimen of your people;
you are cultured and capable; you oppose Tolstoy.
You are a horse-whisperer, an assassinator of tigers,
you are Alexander-Nebuchadnezzar.
(You are a Professor of Energy
as the whackjobs among us now say.)

You think that life is a fire,
that progress is eruption
and into whatever bones you shoot,
you hit the future.

No.

The United States is powerful and huge.
And when it shakes itself a deep temblor
runs down the enormous vertebrae of the Andes.
If it yells, its voice is like the ripping boom of the lion.
It is just as Hugo said to Grant: "The stars are yours."
(Glinting wanly, it raises itself, the Argentine sun,
and the star of Chile rises too...) You are rich —
you join the cult of Hercules with the cult of Mammon;
and illuminating the way of easy conquest,
"Freedom" has found its torch in New York.

But our America, which has had poets
from the ancient times of Netzahualcoyotl,
which has kept walking in the footprints of the great Bacchus
(who had learned the Panic alphabet at one glance);
which has consulted the stars, which has known Atlantis,
(whose name comes down drumming to us in Plato),
which has lived since the old times on the very light of this world,
on the life of its fire, its perfume, its love,
the America of the great Moctezuma, of the Inca,
our America smelling of Christopher Columbus,
our Catholic America, our Spanish America,
the America in which the noble Cuauhtemoc said:
"I am in no bed of roses": that same America
which tumbles in the hurricanes and lives for Love,
it lives, you men of Saxon eyes and Barbarian souls.
And it dreams. And it loves, and it vibrates; and she is the daughter of the Sun!
Be very careful. Long live this Spanish America!
The Spanish Lion has loosed a thousand cubs today: they are at large, Roosevelt,
and if you are to snag us, outlunged and awed,
in your claws of iron, you must become God himself,
the alarming Rifleman and the hardened Hunter.

And though you count on everything, you lack the one thing needed:
God.

— Rubén Darío, 1904 translated by Gabriel Gudding,
forthcoming in *Poems for the Millennium*, v. 3.

Answered Prayers: Live and Dangerous

From *Answered Prayers: Clean* and *Disappear*, as imparted at Stain Bar, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, on March 30, 2007. Both Mary Evelyn Harju and Mary Walker Graham were in attendance. Cheers.

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Poems

From Otoliths
From Scantly Clad
Press
Equations: Thesis:
Heather Mullen
From P.F.S. Post
From Dusie Press
More from X-Peri
More from P.F.S.
Post
From P.F.S. Post
From Ungovernable
Press
From Words Dance

.....

Return to

Art Recess

.....



ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

P.F.S.: Symbolists and Hallucinogenics Pt. 2

My first full PSU semester was the fall of '94. My first real girlfriend in State College was Kelly McCabe. She grew up in the Philly suburb Lansdale, a twenty-minute drive from Cheltenham (though when I visited her on holiday breaks, I would do so from Gulph Mills, where my family moved that fall). Kelly's interest in the arts was photography— she snapped a vaunted picture of me sitting by a tree in one of the quad areas around North Halls, where we lived. We had both chosen to live in North Halls— it was the hip dorm, the misfits dorm, the artists' dorm, and the queer dorm. Kelly was 5'4 (average girl's height), chunky, and cherubic, with blonde hair and blue eyes. I used to liken her (drolly) to a Dutch milk-maid. I soon found a way of annoying the entire North Halls community— when I wasn't sitting in my room (322 Holmes) writing songs (which also requires one to open one's mouth and sing, often in a fumbling fashion), I was in the Holmes basement pounding on the piano. The windows would've been open from both rooms. Where academic discipline was concerned in '94, I didn't have much; that came later. Most of my discipline went into writing songs (moving, by '94, also into writing poems and prose), and I was certainly working as hard as any other PSU freshman, just on my own unique tangent.

The fall of '94 was an interesting time for rock music— Kurt Cobain was gone, and it looked like Billy Corgan and Courtney Love might move in to take his place; Amer-Indie was still ploughing away, and all the new Amer-Indie crap was always circulating around North Halls; and we were the first on campus to take heed of what "Brit-Pop" was. Plenty of the North Halls indie brats would laugh at me and my music— especially when I took out my Les Paul and played lead guitar. It was for these types to effete scowl at classic rock. I laughed at them right back. But because I knew and could play tons of Velvets songs (for instance), I'd wind up hanging with them too.

One pleasant surprise was that North Halls lived up to its reputation— it was a little, circumscribed world. I was always bemused by what East Halls was in relation to us— a visit to Kentucky. It was all football, jocks, Long Island tanning salon bitches and sleaze. The "circumscribed world" quality is what North and East Halls shared. Many of the other dorms, like West, South, and Pollock Halls, had a miscellaneous, grab-bag quality. All the dorms had the same food— and oh what food it was. I don't mean that completely ironically. The standard meat-and-potatoes American fare was spiced up with

Mexican, Italian, and (occasionally) French imports; and everybody, even the indie brats, loved the ice-cream machines. I, in the fall of '94, happened to be a fastidious vegetarian freak (which I'm not anymore); and my food tastes were obscure in the extreme. But I didn't starve.

What Kelly captured in this shot was my stance before the world in '94— I was punkishly determined to be a rock musician at all costs. Even as I'd broadened enough to have literary and theater aspirations, and was writing poems and plays, too. If only the Outlaws (Outlaw Playwrights) would produce one of my one-acts— that's what I wanted. All in the context of being a philosophy major, taking classes and doing homework like everyone else. Was I a bit much? Certainly; I even looked younger than my age. But North Halls was the right place at the right time for me, and us.

.....

One exciting aspect of living in North Halls was the dinners— not the food but the “meat market” aspect of Warnock Commons, and how far different residents would go to make themselves not only attractive but conspicuous at these meals. What could happen at dinner was always a perpetual highlight of each of our days— not just who sat with whom, but dialogues initiated and trysts worked towards. On a tangent, though our dorm rooms were sardine-can small and cramped (leading to the endless grossness of *sex-in-front-of-your-roommate*, or, even worse and inversely, *their sex in front of you*), Warnock Commons was very deluxe— within an hour of dinner's conclusion, the snack bar opened and stayed open until ten or eleven. The group I fell into with Kelly McCabe instantly was prickly— a rough crowd for conformists or anyone not on our particular wavelength. One night in the fall of '95 (by which time Kelly had abandoned North Halls and we'd lost track of her), my friend Jeremy (not, btw, Jeremy Eric Tenenbaum, ensconced as he was at Villanova at the time) and I decided to satisfy one of our punkish impulses and show up at Warnock Commons in drag (I wasn't wearing a beard and mustache then and could still pull this off). We wimped out from doing this at dinner; it was too major a commitment, even for us. Helps to remember: in the Nineties, everyone cross-dressed. Androgyny meant you were on the crest of the zeitgeist wave about *having a plan to stick it to the Man*. Even straight kids like myself were drawn in by the rebellious aspect of doing that drag *thang*. You were either possessed by this bravado-geist or not: the bizarre marriage of Holden Caulfield to RuPaul.

So: we settled for the compromise of showing up at the snack bar in drag. Our friend Becca set us up with clothes— Becca, like Jeremy, was from the Pittsburgh area, and Becca and Jeremy had briefly gone out too. Nothing much happened at the snack bar; it turns out, we moseyed in and moseyed out. But I'd at least proven to myself that I could take certain exhibitionistic plunges. One paradigmatic change which shook North Halls in the fall of '95 was a full-scale “hippie invasion.” Suddenly, North Halls was not only artists, misfits, and queers but Phish-fixated, Frisbee throwing, shroom-imbibing suburban hippie types. They all lived in unisex Leete Hall (Holmes was all male and Runkle, all female) and were always hanging out outside— they were difficult to avoid. Sometimes, I'd write songs in the Leete basement as well as Holmes, and one of the hippie girls from the Philly 'burbs

would come down and smoke me up (or smoke me out, as they say on the west coast). As I found out years later, a good amount of the weed around North Halls (and all over the east coast) was laced—leading to the odd vista of suburbanite, day-tripping, middle-class hippies tripped out on PCP for years at a time. Enrollment in PSU itself might then establish itself as an issue. The downward spiral.

North Halls being what it was, the artists, hipsters, queers and hippies all wound up getting high together. Our lives were no longer unmolested by authorities— Becca and Mandee (who me and my friends had dubbed “North Girl” or “Cure Girl” in ’94, though she more closely resembled Hope Sandoval, and who joined our circle in ’95) got busted for pot possession and had to appear in court. I noticed then (and later experiences in New York and Philly proved this true) that I have a natural aptitude for evading authority, and not getting nailed for my transgressions. Becca and I were funny that semester— we slept in the same bed number of times (both before and after the authorities at PSU separated her from Mandee and she was forced back to Runkle) without hooking up; whereas Mandee and I hit each other and ran. Most of us were being decadent about our academic work (and in the early Aughts I did harsh penance for this)— Jeremy wasn’t. He was always up shit’s creek if he went out too much, and he wouldn’t get high. We repeated our drag trick a few times (once on Halloween, if I remember correctly), and I learned the vagaries of walking around in pumps. Not worth it, I felt. But the Nineties experience wouldn’t have been complete without it.

.....

State College in the Nineties had quirks, and North Halls had quirks too. You’d think we wouldn’t go to frat parties, but we did. The rules for Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights were pretty *laissez faire* and, where parties were concerned, anything was fair game. Frat parties were never that much fun for me personally. I developed a taste for hard alcohol fast in State College, rather than beer. Of course, you couldn’t get a Jack n’ Coke at a PSU frat party; you could only hit the keg like everyone else. They’d almost always have Bob Marley and the Wailers blasting, or an alterna-covers band set up in the living room (by the time I left State College even I’d played a few frats). We usually didn’t stay long. Also, in State College, lots of people lived in raunchy, ugly high-rise apartment buildings and complexes, which made the small town seem semi-urban; the parties in these domiciles were bizarre, too. The apartments tended to be little more than studio size— and they’d try to do the whole “kegger” set-up in them. Our main priority was usually to find someone to share their weed with us, if we weren’t carrying ourselves. Stoned or not, party-hopping in the dead of winter in State College was onerous; we had to face the long-ass walk back, late at night and stoned or drunk, to North Halls. We usually stopped at Ye Olde College Diner (known to everyone in State College as just “the Diner”) first, which was open all night, and where we’d get coffee to warm and sober up. Thankfully, the dorms did have central heating.

On Sundays, we were generally zombies; and few North Halls residents could get excited about football games. Many of us got through our years in State College without ever making it to a PSU game. The big campus chant (“*We are/ Penn State!*”) never made it up to North Halls. As has been

mentioned elsewhere, we lived in exquisite ignorance of Joe Paterno and everything he represented, in our own alternate universe. As winter turned to spring, North Halls turned scenic— beyond being the most individualistic of the dorms, it was also the smallest (three halls), and the quads were large and green. You could sit outside in March and April and enjoy yourself. As spring sprung, there were all kinds of festivals and mini-festivals, official and unofficial, around North Halls, too, including Northstock, which was usually held on the converted basketball courts and which featured some import bands and some musicians (like myself) who also lived in North Halls. None of the other dorms had anything like Northstock, to my knowledge; and if you decided to light up outside (which we did), the authorities might kindly decide not to notice. In fact, State College in spring and summer was a fantastic place to get stoned in peace— the quaint sections of the town and campus (like North Halls) could become beatific with the right weed around; and it was unlikely that anything would come along to make you paranoid. To get caught out, you'd have to be blatantly profligate (which Becca and Mande, unfortunately, were); a reasonable amount of discretion could always save the day.

It also became difficult, in North Halls during the spring months, to maintain any kind of academic discipline (by spring '96, I'd managed to establish a low maintenance level of such discipline, barring courses in my major, which I felt more passionately about); everyone wanted to be outside. For some reason, the spring of '96 was particularly intense, partly because North Halls suddenly had a line in to getting as much pot as we wanted, and many of us were being more promiscuous than usual. The energy had real fertility and hopefulness in it, and it was difficult not to feel hopeful then. It was a brief moment of peace which little intruded upon. A big chunk of the Nineties in America was remarkably unobstructed by national malaises, national scams. Halcyon, I would say, next to 2025.

.....

Indie State College was a real place. From the spring of '96 forward, I dwelt in it at least part of the time (until I left State College in late '98). The rules were the rules— to gain entrance into the charmed circles, certain prerequisites had to be met. Obviously, you had to pledge allegiance to indie rock music, to at least some extent, and not just the local stuff. Folkways in these circles deemed most commercial (corporate) rock music detritus; however, the Alternative Revolution had created a context in which indie bands like Sonic Youth could be signed to major labels and maintain credibility, so by the mid-Nineties in State College opinions were fluid on that level. Holding on to vinyl and having a vinyl record player was an inestimable advantage; and vinyl was not only hip but cheap. State College was tiny enough that all the charmed circle indie kids would be listening to the same records at the same time— and one facet of the State College indie scene I appreciated, and which wasn't replicated in other cities' scenes, was a scholarly attitude towards the history of rock music. It wasn't conservative, but preservative; and it meant you could be just as *au courant* with the Chocolate Watch Band or Love's second album (with *Orange Skies* on it) as with Spiritualized or Guided by Voices.

Some tastes particular to State College I didn't share, like Robyn Hitchcock and shoe-gazer bands; but the State College guys would sit and bullshit with you for hours on end if you had half-decent musical tastes. Although I liked Guided by Voices, for a long time my major hinge to these guys was Big Star and Nick Drake. The Big Star discourses, especially, went round and round in a million circles, and I carried them to NYC and Philly later. State College hipster-ism wasn't extreme; and you could still like the Doors, Stones, Hendrix, etc. These guys were scholars— they would consider anything. What was frowned upon (unusually) was just listening to your friends and your friends' bands; people with catholic tastes actually got along better, which was perfect for me. Like many scholars, these guys weren't necessarily ambitious— they weren't on a quest for world domination. They could be clannish — you couldn't push your way into the circles. In many ways, they were quaint, like the nicer bits of State College itself. The White Lodge, where many Amer-Indie bands passed through, was also quaint; set on the edge of a forest with a highway running on the other side of it. The way the White Lodge was run influenced the Philly Free School shows at the Highwire— there was free booze around a good part of the time, and the vibe was warm and congenial. State College down-home was always a real vibe. Not an especially uptight place, up close.

What influenced State College indie even more was that the scene produced no conquering heroes on a national or international level; which meant that, even if it didn't have that high a profile, social climbing was kept to a minimum. What I remember most distinctly are the records I borrowed to try and get into, having caught and internalized the scholar's curiosity— I couldn't get into late-era Byrds or Gram Parsons, or Richard Thompson; but I acquired a taste for Pulp and solo Brian Eno. State College indie was so mellow I was stunned by the Machiavellian gymnastics in other scenes I saw later on. If I did cross swords with the State College indie crowd, it was for this reason— the players were extraordinarily intelligent, bordering on brilliant, but semi-comatose nonetheless. They were not only pot-heads but acid trippers, and I tripped with them. I learned: you haven't been frightened until you've heard *Pink Moon* on acid. The creepy underbelly of State College's quaintness revealed itself when I tripped— and the indie crews, despite their low-key brilliance, could be creepish. Maybe that's why I stuck to 3rd/*Sister Lovers* and *Pink Moon* so much in State College— having a taste for the macabre, that dark underbelly was my favorite part of the town, and scene.

.....

The story of me and the Outlaw Playwrights is another funny one; and, oddly enough, it begins with music. In the fall of '94, many of the theater department queen bees were living in North Halls. The first mini-festival I played was backing up my friend Jason Liebman; he was playing his songs on an acoustic, and I was playing lead on my Les Paul behind him, in a converted North Halls lounge in Warnock Commons. In dramatic, diva-like fashion, one of the theater girls draped herself over a chair and made eyes at us. When the set was over, she gave us a rap— not only about the theater department, but about what Outlaw Playwrights was. Jason didn't seem interested but, having some theater experience, my ears perked up. Outlaw Playwrights did seem to be one of the few hinges the theater department had to reaching a wider public than just theater majors— every Thursday night at

eleven p.m., they put up a student or graduate student written one-act play, in a context open to the general public, down in the bowels of the theater building near North Halls, in a black box theater space.

The problem was, I thought I could go and be inconspicuous; I was wrong. Maybe because everyone from North Halls knew me for my music; maybe because I'd done Carnegie Mellon Pre-College for drama in the summer of '92, and one of my fellow pre-college students was now in the PSU drama department, and thus some kind of rep preceded me; I felt gawked and pawed at instantly. The first time I went to Outlaws in late '94, I got awful butterflies. This quickly became a tradition— for my four years in State College, I couldn't descend into those theater building bowels without feeling like I'd just been struck by a polo mallet. Without wanting to be smarmy or obvious, Outlaws was always a very dramatic experience for me. As of early '95, I was feverishly writing one-acts; but Outlaws was clannish— I still wasn't socially connected enough to get my plays up there. In late '95, I managed to get Nick Dobson's play, called *The Gut*, up; that was a decent first step; but it wasn't until (literally) my twenty-first birthday in '97 that one of my one-acts went up.

Luckily, '97/'98 saw a kind of regime change. "Outlaws, the Next Generation" was much more germane to me than the original crew, who were immersed in a good amount of pride and prejudice just because I wasn't actually a theater major. By '99, I was in New York, and they'd produced four of my one-acts, usually unthinkable for anyone but a theater major. It's also true that, by late '98 when I left State College, I was in good standing enough with the theater kids to be invited to their parties, which were at a huge tangent to State College indie parties. Theater parties at PSU were like little staged plays themselves; different arranged scenes and interactions played themselves out. If one of the major divas decided to "shotgun" you, it was an event. The theater kids had odd taste in music, too, like Soul Coughing. I could go to their parties, but I never got particularly comfortable with them; the unease element never changed. Getting stoned with them was a surreal experience, for that reason— I knew it couldn't be that comfortable. Perhaps it was because, as I sensed, they weren't that comfortable with themselves. I still don't know why they couldn't get loose, especially the first gen theater crew, who, from what I saw, lived their lives as if their lives were staged by Ionesco. Again, creepy.

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The poem *Le Chat Noir* from my book *Posit* is about an actual black cat. Few in America would remember what the original Le Chat Noir ("The Black Cat") was— a hotspot in decadent 1890s Paris, where denizens like Toulouse-Lautrec would indulge in absinthe, opium, and filthily erogenous, transgressive sexual intercourse, straight or queer. Of all the places in America to replicate the richly sleazy vibe of Le Chat Noir, State College, Pennsylvania would not seem to be high on the list— most would say New Orleans or San Francisco (among others) first. I wasn't able to visit New Orleans or San Francisco in the late Nineties; maybe they did have their own Le Chat Noir replicant. But, oddly, State College in the Nineties did also have its own Le Chat Noir— it was called, simply enough, the Coffee

Cellar, and to descend into the Cellar (it was below street level, adjacent a tacky take-out pizza joint) was to submerge yourself in a subterranean realm where there were no limits or bounds, no bottom. Of course, there was a major difference between the Cellar and Le Chat Noir— the Cellar served coffee, rather than booze. But, importantly, the Cellar was tolerant of substances brought in; in other words, you could smoke whatever you wanted to over your coffee; and it didn't even have to be in the black-painted, mirror-laden bathroom that you did so.

Needless to say, the sexual raunch at the Cellar was also intense— mostly because the less green of the teenage townie girls made it their home away from home. Many of them considered themselves “Goth” or “vampires”— they smoked clove cigarettes and wore fetish boutique clothing. I myself liked to wear black leather pants and a Celtic Cross at the time. People had different ways of passing time at the Cellar— because we were often stoned, time tended to pass strangely. There was an acoustic piano, some kind of quiz-game machine, and a little stage where artists occasionally performed. I spent most of my time writing— during the fall of '98, I was spewing out an attempt to meld poetry and theater, which was later compressed into a one-act called *Mortuary Puppies* and produced by the Outlaws in '99 while I was in New York. It was a strange place to fall in love, but I did fall in love with someone at the Cellar. Not all of the townie girls, including the Goths and vampires, were bitches— and many of the scenes started at the Cellar were continued elsewhere. As the fall of '98 progressed, things at the Cellar got looser and looser— not only were there heroin rings created and oriented around the place, acid and E were easy to find, too.

As is worth mentioning, the place was dimly lit (even during daylight hours, owing to its windowless place below street level, though the front glass façade let in some light), had low ceilings and amounted to a long, narrow strip; regulars like myself usually sat towards the back. The little stage wasn't closed off; there were tables on it. The strip was long enough that if you lit a joint at the book, the staff wouldn't necessarily be able to smell the smoke at the front. Not that they'd care if they did smell the smoke. The black-out bathroom could be a trip when you were stoned; it was large and spacy for the long, narrow room, and couples often went into it to hook up— the effect was half Poe, half Sixties London: be cool with your buzz, or die a Red Death. I was once tripping balls enough to get caught in there for half an hour, not knowing or being able to remember where I was. If there was a deficit in comparison with the original Le Chat Noir, it was that the Cellar closed early, at ten or eleven, and there were no bohemian bars in State College. The bar scene, in fact, was as pure Paterno as it could be. If we adjourned elsewhere, it was to someone's flat, or house; many of which were equipped to extend the nights well into the morning hours.

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The center of State College proper consisted of two parallel streets, College and Beaver (Ave.), both of which were comprised of strips of restaurants, bars, book and record stores, knick-knack/paraphernalia places, and, at the far end of College Ave. near South Halls, McLanahan's, the great all-purpose semi-supermarket outlet for PSU students. The side streets running perpendicular to

College and Beaver were more of the same, with an emphasis on bars and pricier eateries. The Coffee Cellar was also on one of these side streets. As has been mentioned, the bar scene in Nineties State College was stagnant; hang-out places for jocks, would-be jocks, and middle-of-the-road types. Away from the two-street strips, State College was structured very much like a typical American suburb; street after street of middle-class consonant houses; that was the surface layer. But many of the middle-class consonant houses amounted to boarding houses for PSU students and young State College residents, including townies— and they (myself included by '96-'98) tended to live in clusters. House-party culture in late Nineties State College depended on these clusters, and hipsters like myself playing *the sublet game*— for months or years, a house could establish itself (occasionally an apartment worked too) as a happening party venue, and receive the elite of the State College hipsters and bohemians every time it opened its doors. Precisely one time, in '98, a party established itself at my sublet (which had a porch), and I was honored.

The most fortuitous house-strip was always West College Ave., where the houses were capacious enough to comfortably hold a hundred guests and a band. When I first began to attend these parties in '95, they weren't particularly elaborate; possibly a keg or band, just people hanging out. By '98, a new baroque era of State College house parties had set in— often there'd be a nitrous tank, which meant free (or cheap) whippets; and, in '98, you could get not only pot at these soirees but imported hash and opium. The pace at these parties was usually leisurely— people would wander in and out. The social mores were not particularly rigid in these contexts either— even though the indie kids and townies tended to dominate the action. On West College, sometimes you'd see indie kids, jocks, and middle-of-the-roads together— there were crossroads involving music and drugs where everyone could and did converge. One of the biggest Madame Verdurin salon/ house party locales was run by two guys who weren't particularly indie kids— it was colloquially known as “Bob n' Rob's.” In '98, their house parties were the biggest, and most lavish. Everyone went, and met, and mingled, and I knew the truth even then— for the indie kids to get the drugs (especially pot and hash) they wanted, they had to “play the game” just like everyone else. Bob n' Rob imposed their version of Machiavellian politics on the indie crowd, and the indie crowd just had to accept it.

So, we all endured the middling music being played and the kegged out ambience, and even the Guided by Voices acolytes stood in the big lines with smiles on their faces. Truth be told, it wasn't that squeamish— the Bob n' Rob set-up wasn't all Dave Mathews Band and sports trivia. There was, in those days, a specific kind of ska-listening State College hipster who walked a fine line between indie snobbery and the broad interests (including sports and beer) of an Everyman; Bob n' Rob were archetypal examples. They were hybrids. I got in line and drank the beer. On good nights, we could migrate from Bob n' Rob's to something else going on. House parties weren't particularly tight in State College in those days— there would always be some middle-of-the-roads around. It was to our credit that, among us, no one cared that much, or played possum about it.

From *Equations*: Antithesis in Scud

Three pieces from the antithesis section of the dialectic *Equations* in Scud.

Equations: Synthesis

The crux of the matter is this: it's time for me to jump into some fray again. I'm restless: I know that what you gain in solitude has to be pushed out into the open for there to be some truth consonance, and these peregrinations are not enough. Jade has been bolstering my confidence; but I'm too old to just hit the bars and the clubs like I used to. So I'm poised to do something, I just don't know what yet. Like mathematics, human life has distinct compensations: there is always another equation to be formulated and parsed, a new slant, novel ways of perceiving realities that are leveled and layered to begin with. And, somewhere in the distance, a miracle always hovers: the promise of a few truly lived moments, in which every narcissistic schema is transcended in the sense that something is being given and received on both sides. If I didn't believe this, there would be no reason not to commit suicide, because I already feel I've done enough work for one life-time, and the growth of my seeds has been more than adequate. But because the deepest truths are social, it cannot be my life-path to give up on my own humanity, and everyone else's. I have claimed that these miracles usually transpire in a sexual context, but I have learned in writing this book that this does not have to be the case. Our greatest consonance with reality and humanity is expressed any time something moves in an upwards direction between ourselves and someone else; any equation involving legitimate ascension is one worth investigating.

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Beams: Madame Psychosis: Becky Grace

for Becky Hilliker

It's woven into her, that polo shirt.
She might even fuck w/ it.
Not "we", post-we or sub-we, but
just "pseudo", "quasi", "ersatz".
Nothing w/ "self" in it; nothing
implying discrete boundaries.
Becky isn't bounded, or has
boundlessness woven into her...

Polo shirts are what they are,
remain so. If I say “objective
correlative”, I bring string into it,
so that Becky might be
strung up. I don’t deny a “literal”
element, or that Becky might stay in.
All I mean is, between “us”, there’s
“more-than-us”. That’s what I’m
“getting at”; it’s woven into me

Beams: Madame Psychosis: eye eye eye

for Maggie Mangual

nile-wide, eye eye eye.
a sylph, bee low my buzz.
it wants, to do, at mouth.
no. not every one. can end,
dare a-licked, like is. or:
put it, porn again. dew wit
like its done, on, cyber.
space, opened, bee twain. no,
went in sight. tight tight.

© Adam Fieled, Henniker, New Hampshire 2006

Beams rides again

Beams rides again, on Blazevox. Many thanks to Geoffrey Gatz.

From Great Works

PROGRESS POEM #457

dry summerleaf drops on southbank
stone— stood on sounds like plastic:

someone checks their back pocket for visa

© Chris McCabe 2005

From *Seven Corners Poetry* (7C)

girls against boys

When she makes an o of her mouth,
the forsythia behind her head bursts into flame,
singes clothes-lines full of blue gingham
pinafores, yellow flowered sheets.
When she bends at the waist, she can make an o
of her body— a birdcall, a tiny pink sequin.
Can make up names for the baby teeth
beneath her dresser— *Lydia, Amelia*—
their tiny lion tin. Can define the pinwheel
of her arms falling through dark.

The trellis by the steps slicks in the rain—
all night he calls for his extra rib,
his good heart's hinge. *Sad, sad.*
No one can sleep with him. The world
is all checked cotton and charm bracelets now.
I can move my mouth in a whisper.
Could give you the instructions,
if you found the proper word.

© Kristy Bowen 2006

From *Seven Corners Poetry*

LIKE THE DEVIL

He holds on to life with his teeth,
dangles it by the nape.
Tastes with the fury of cayenne,

says *hush-hush-hush*
with his hands as he drinks
wine from me like an open spoon.
He can tell magenta from maroon.
He grins like the devil,
all jump-start & red bell
pepper. Stitches me together
as if my cunt is a wound,
his tongue, copacetic.
I mend, sprout wings,
scream things.
A firebird possessed
of the power to fly,
he shuts his eyes,
wills it so.
Off he goes.
Grunt & scruff, this
spitfire, hellcat—
a scrapper who turns the screws
of my truss rod, straightens
my back. Names the stars
of my knees with one eye
closed, opens my gates,
faces the bull.
Olé! He's muy caliente.
Itch, bitch, & boil,
he celebrates supine
& sublime. Pins
the tail on the donkey
every time, this toreador.
A necromantic lynx who
swallows whole but plays
legato, in tune.
He follows me out of rooms.
Hush-hush-hush.
It will be all right.
He who holds on to life with his teeth
will never go hungry.
Faster, pussycat.
Kill! Kill!

From *P.F.S. Post*

POEM IN THREE PARTS

I. Leaving for Leaving's Sake

Packing the car as if they were punctuating
an old song with too-loud drumbeats,
she was her mother's mother, her moving
mouth turned into a tight twist of, *we're
moving too slowly, we're losing.*
He slammed the trunk with a final cymbal
crash and she folded into the sound, the song
they made boiled up its own lyrics, said,
*Bring me the road, bring me the thick-black
of nothing, let me swallow the asphalt,
eat that yellow line until it splits me in two.*

II. Roadkill

White car. Woman who looks like
the librarian from elementary school.
Dead squirrel. Rogue redwood. Glare
of every big bad sunrise's pressure
to keep alive. Stick-shift. Radio.
This is called what? Living. A little
unkind invitation to meet an end-point,
to push through this small town's
generated hum and see someone else's
gas station, someone else's dead squirrel
and name it, found.

III. The Equation for Emptiness

She rests her head on the window wet
with breath and fog just outside

the Harris Ranch on Interstate 5.
She remembers her mother's head
hanging low in her hands at a
rest stop around here somewhere,
her face having lost its scaffolding
of *okay, we're all okay*, and fallen.
Peel of wind, she pictures the velocity
equation. One must have speed
and direction to calculate anything.
What do we push through? And where to?
In her brain's engine too many past
tenses drag their heavy feet in black
tunnels, slow the globe's spin.
She wants to be empty, the night
before it's broken by an owl's screech,
that one moment at dawn at some
roadside Red Lion Inn where you
forget where you are, and how far
you've come to get there, your mind
gone white-hot clean before thousands
of wet hands, the fat lip at the reservoir,
the closet floor, the dead cat, the dead,
come in and enter with the blinds pulled
back. She thinks she could go farther
faster without the drag of what she carries;
nothing but her body's own quiet
insistence to accelerate—

© Ada Limon 2009

Adam Fieled (State College, Pennsylvania, USA): "Room 510, Atherton Hilton"

Lightning illuminates the pale sky; rain
on the leaves sounds like waves. Snakes
rattle across the Earth, hold themselves
erect under the onslaught. Your body,
Jennifer— lax against a pillow, aghast
at the finality of clouds. Lampshades
are tan mushrooms— wallets stuffed

with obscure currencies. Some stray
Ruth may (later) come to wound me.
Swim for your life, junk-in-the-veins
Narcissus— Rimbaud is just a button
to push, guided by voices or not. Our
face of passion is one we had before we were born.

© Adam Fieled 1996

P.F.S.: Symbolists and Hallucinogenics

Nineties heritage, as it could start from State College, works under the aegis of what was being imbibed by the kiddies— not uppers or downers (that much), but hallucinogenics. Many nights in the mid-to-late Nineties, the Nineties revolution in State College was a revolution-in-consciousness around skewered perspectives and visionary trances. State College was and is serviced, in this respective, by something beneath the surface which illuminates the entirety of Happy Valley, and central Pennsylvania— a mystique emanating from Mother Nature herself, around a sense of earth magic resonating from the greener areas in and around State College. Nature breathes there. Hallucinogens heighten the sense of ecstasy and fulsomeness bestowed by greenery on the place.

No joke that, on the syllabus for true Nineties State College hipsters, a place was made for the French Symbolist poets of the nineteenth century— Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Verlaine. Hipsterism, in an era of turmoil, balanced imperatives other than just popular music and parties— reading culture in State College wasn't nothing. Other than the philosophy texts I was studying, up to and including Kant and over to the Deconstructionists (philosophy was my major at PSU, and my philosophy credits did transfer over to Penn), the heaviest lit in my brain were the Symbolists, who took all of our sense of being on trips and navigating mind-scapes and articulated what we couldn't, yet.

So, the lot of us had not just a sense of a soundtrack for our adventures— we had texts which meant something to us, which were also conduits to our personal (and collective) revolutions. The poem from *Something Solid, Season in Hell: White Candle* takes, and places this set of circumstances on the table for all to see. Rimbaud, in his masterwork, enacts an interior process in text of complete personal revision and revolution of self. My poem takes what was already transformative and makes it do double-time, enumerating not only a personal revolution but a revolution pertaining to the rigors of early marriage. Marriage and Rimbaud are not naturally simpatico; but the Nineties sense of unlikely juxtapositions (including State College's game of class-confounding) take, and make the contingencies which serve the poem resonate to a Symbolistic frequency. Such is one pertinent manifestation of Nineties-ism. Other, similar early work, like *Room 510 Atherton Hilton* and *The dawn broke over our bodies*, takes Symbolist impulses and radically eroticizes them, working along a vibe

axis of enchantment/damnation, searching for a potent voice still youthful, still casual, in heaven/hell. If something or someone was supposed to be inhibiting our creativity, they failed.

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On a more practical note: State College in the 90s was very strange. It should've been that, being an artist and coming from a background steeped in the arts, I would feel uncomfortable and disoriented there. After all, people associate State College and Penn State with football, Joe Paterno, and little else. Granted, PSU State College is a high-ranking school with several outstanding departments (including continental philosophy, which was my major), but its image or "face to the world" is all about athletics. It's just that I didn't find State College that limiting. There was an active underground scene in the arts in the 90s which gave the place some real vitality.

I moved to State College in '94 without formalizing any plans to do theater or anything theater related. I had spent the summer of '92 at Carnegie Mellon doing pre-college for acting, but it hadn't led anywhere. What theater at PSU had going that I was intrigued with was a weekly series of plays, written by students and graduate students and produced by them too: Outlaw Playwrights. By the spring of '95, I was actively writing plays, because the outlet to have them produced was there. By the the spring of '99 (I had left a script in late '98 once I'd moved to NYC), I'd had four one-acts produced.

State College had an active indie rock scene, too. Summer in State College in the 90s can't have been that much different than Athens, Georgia in the early 80s. The whole town was slowed down. Everyone involved in State College Indie lived in a room in a house and there were house parties all the time. What State College needed, but never got, was an R.E.M., to be a flagship bearer from State College to the world. There were candidates; the best and most popular candidate was a band of which every member was a local icon. They were musically great and very muscular (and as classicist about musical quality as early R.E.M.) but no one in the band could sing. If this band had had a Michael Stipe, the whole movement in State College would've come to the surface much faster.

People were fucking. To the extent that some arts scenes in America have problems with this, State College didn't. The sexual mores were pretty blase about faithfulness and seriousness, too. This extended even to life on campus; North Halls was considered the "artsy" set of dorms, and I lived there for a long time. The idea of doing pick-up routines, hanging around playing music and smoking pot, and grooving on what you were going to do in the arts when you "grew up" was *de rigueur*. What was important was that you could live on campus if you were an artist and still not starve to death spiritually. We all absorbed the 90s ethos, which amounted to a more tortured and world-weary version of the 60s. And most of us listened to the same music. Nirvana weren't too big in State College: Smashing Pumpkins, Radiohead, Sonic Youth, Guided by Voices, the Flaming Lips were all massive. I got into Nick Drake and Big Star on the side. Brit-Pop, particularly Blur, was around.

How did we relate to the football shenanigans? We didn't. We simply acted as if they weren't happening. In North Halls, on South Atherton Street, on West College, you could get away from that crap, and really do it, and mean it. Although visiting East Halls was always a fun education on what it meant to live on the dark side of things.

I liked my philosophy classes, and did well in them. They were a handful of other courses I liked. If I often flaked out on Gen Ed requirements, it's because I was a flake in many ways in those days. Philosophy engaged me; other than that, my mind was possessed by the arts. Or intoxicants. By 1997, they were coffeeshops in State College where, if you knew the right people, you could buy *gooballs* over the counter. Or smoke a joint openly sitting out in the cafe. Bohemia, and the scandals in it.

The last six months I spent in State College in '98 were the happiest. It was a bacchanal to match anything in Philly, Chicago, NYC or DC. And if no one in the wider world knew or cared that it was happening, we were too young to notice or fret that this was the case. We'd get to that later.

From Seven Corners Poetry

A VILLANELLE

I have undone our bent decision laughing sadly.
Between wind and wound, the day pitches down.
We are a replicating setting devoid of greenery,

with hoes, tropes, and our mass machinery
with licensed language but without listening we drone.
I have undone our bent decision laughing sadly

as though to speck electric and forgo our power medley.
We divine to be verbs but end up as proper nouns.
We are a replicating setting devoid of greenery,

trying through the days' languor to talk avidly
of words settling among sheets slipped facedown,
the stillness undone, our bent decision laughing sadly.

An embryonic engineering; an abracadabra of absently
searching the haphazard circuitry of words. Yes, this brown
field is a replicating setting devoid of greenery,

a discord of clouds at our throats, a soured creamery

left hastily for the rush of law, of light, of renown.
Still moving with our bent decision laughing sadly,
we replicate settings devoid of greenery.

© William Allegrezza and Simone Muench 2009

Adam Fieled (State College, Pennsylvania): from *Answered Prayers and Willard Preachers*

SONG FOR MARIA

My scarlet letter let you in
We rallied on our separate beds
The way to blue was flushed with ice
Your tongue possesses everything

(lighten my,
watch my,
blow my)

In any case the case is closed
We walk the streets, a trackless train
My verdant prayer is your own skin
I can't believe I'm free again

Relax—

Ice yr drink—

Think—

Pursue a purpose, lost in flame
Become the scum you dote on, crab
The sky, the ground, the square you are
The realm of flesh is one lone purge...

mercy mercy mercy
mercy mercy

© Adam Fieled 1998

From *Eyewear*

AMARYLLIS CANADIAN TIRE

Near the return and exchange desk
the sink drain blare of *Cash 11, Manager to Cash 11*,
bulb-split amraryllises,
petals halogen rusted, garden bulimic,
stand sturdy in clay cups
while the mats at the automatic door grow streamy
with boot tracked snow, slush.

Ski coats shift sibilation,
each down-plump body
maneuvering the card table,
careful not to catch a leaf
above sparkle-glue bijouteries,
outsized flanges, piano hinges.

Amaryllis—
dismissed amid vulcanized rubber
boxing day sale perfume—
an ostentatious widow
price shops at the discount tire.

© Tammy Armstrong 2006

From *Equations: Antithesis*

Here's the complicated equation: if there isn't much reality in human relationships, but you have to have them, you must embrace the responsibility of making them as realistic as possible. There can be no *I am just this, you are just that*: the realistic approach is one that fastens and binds to nothing. Jade will be over in a few hours and, as I prepare myself, I realize that to not-fasten leaves one perpetually unequipped. But somehow it doesn't matter— the clench of dissolution is so sweet that no one ever recovers from it. This clench has its own transcendental reality, and if what dissolution really is remains permanently out of our grasp, authoritative judgments must be suspended. Jade is smallish, about 5'2, with long, straight brown hair that falls down her back, delicate Virgo features, and a mien brought to level pitch by many wounds. When we make love, I am forced to be gentler—

gone are the thrashings and poundings, and I find myself in a new position, playing a new role. Jade is an actress, and every gesture she makes is nuanced, deliberate, complex.

.....

Jade keeps pulling surprises. I'm stunned because she does this with a certain amount of levity, as though anything that startles goes up. The drugs she ingests take her to a realm of crystallized perfection, in which she cuts through open spaces like a human blade. Because I am willing to follow her, she initiates me into the mysteries of this realm. I find that my edge is blunted, because in many ways it is a false edge—artificially produced, unstable, past any form of measurement. Nevertheless, when we meet in the middle our edges coalesce. Alright, so this is artificial, she says; what and who gets to define the natural? Can you even tell me what the natural is? I admit that I can't, and this admission transpires at a moment of maximum vulnerability for both of us. Are we razors or mirrors? Jade inhabits a world of hollow forms, which she hovers above—my role in her life is to contradict her thesis, that we might create a dialectic. As we move towards synthesis, Jade places one of her hands on my face, puts her forehead to mine. She knows that there is a sting in her hollowness for me, who would prefer to see fullness. But we go on like this for hours without knowing what or who we are. The depth of this place eats into my eyes, but (as Jade is learning) I enjoy being eaten—chewed, swallowed, digested.

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Poems

From Dusie

Ephemera:

beginning the
work

From The

Brownstone
Review

More from Columbia

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Adam Fieled (editor,

Plymouth

Meeting,
Pennsylvania...

From Tears in the

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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Equations in Otoliths

Pieces from *Equations in Otoliths* 19, from 2010, when I was still producing the first draft of the book.

From *Equations* (2011-2023): Thesis: Wendy Smith

Here I am in New England, getting killed. It's summer, there's weed around, booze. I'm perched on a ledge, feel I'm being pushed off. Look who's here to visit: Wendy, two years older than me, who has two pieces coming out in *Poetry*. My first major piece has been out two months. We immediately become big shots to each other. Wendy has slightly bronzed skin, brownish hair lightened towards dirty blonde, a voluptuous body but a way of holding herself that suggests she finds her own body embarrassing, somehow unworkable. Yet even her diffidence is enticing; it makes guys want to ram through those defenses. Our equation sinks into place: I'm a young Poundian firebrand, she's got all the spiritualized quirkiness of Emily Dickinson, but with sex appeal. We are standing, having drinks in my room, smoking cigarettes in the balminess (open windows, flies). There's a party down the hall we abandoned to smoke in peace. Somehow, a wind current comes into the room and does a loop so that the door closes: a minor miracle, or a universe sign concerning what's meant to happen next. It does: I reach over, begin with gropes, which soon turn into kisses. As we go into this, Wendy lets her hair loose from her ponytail. We are two geniuses, kings and queens, and this is within days of Heather, her positing of me as underling. Such is a life in the arts. When a surfeit of symbolic material lands on two souls, they (sometimes) have no choice but to act them out. As I enter her, Wendy becomes a symbol of my own artistic potency, and I of hers.

As I pound away at Wendy, I notice this about her: she's scared of sex. I am on top of her, she clutches my arms with her hands. It's like she thinks I might go crazy if not held back. Her eyes are opened wide and looking into mine, glazed and petrified. I later find out that fear of sex is one of her great poetic themes. But we bang away on this tiny narrow bed with no sheets in this dorm room that must

Poems

Answered Prayers:
Live and
Dangerous

P.F.S.: Symbolists
and
Hallucinogenics
Pt. 2

From Equations:
Antithesis in Scud

Equations: Synthesis

Beams: Madame
Psychosis: Becky
Grace

Beams: Madame
Psychosis: eye
eye eye

Beams rides again

From Great Works

From Seven Corners
Poetry (7C)

From Seven Corners
Poetry

Return to

Art Recess

suffice for this ten-day residency. I try Jean's tricks (variations) but nothing works; Wendy's afraid. She's denied the unction of a stream; I'm wearing a condom. This goes on all night, right through the New England summer 4 am sunrise. There is some gruesomeness to wolf-hour sunlight that only New Englanders know. She leaves me and there is poignancy to her leaving because we both know this cannot happen again; we have taken our roles too far. She can't handle the moves that accrue to the life of a big genius and I don't like this diffidence in her parts that hates sex, loathes feelings, wants to curl up underneath a crab shell and close its eyes forever. I'm twenty-nine, and I'm building relationships that are instantly obsolescent. Wendy, for one night, got to be a goddess, and me to be a god, only to find out that we're just more normal people doing that hallowed, time-honored routine: *fake it 'til you make it*.

Chris McCabe: Fragment (undated)

Debating the relative merits of Orchestral Manoeuvres in The Dark
or Tears for Fears, while April ice melts slowly in Westmount Park.

Now appears to be less world-shaking than when, Misha G., we both
could be smartly vehement about Richard Rorty, Boy George, Truth,

Logic & being spanked by Marianopolis twins known to us as Ruth.
Not that we were L. Cohen's heirs, but rather a pair of young pioneers

gazing into the future with our smoking jackets for uniforms, sayers
of sooth but more often faux-decadent imbibers of lascivious perfumes,

who often drank tea (before it was Pennyroyal) on mornings as Winter
Dripped away as surely as Youth does— as children, crushed on looms.

If such industrial imagery seems a tad stark, consider the Reagan Years
were also ours in Montreal. We danced: slim Japanese New Wavers,

The Cure & The Smiths our aural neighbours if not allies; felt Time's
Axis turn, as early eloquence (our praxis) dried up in Age's Summer.

From *P.F.S. Post* (2005-2023)

CATCH

The wind turns the water into an animal
& the boat rides the back of swells,
bucking wetly.
My legs absorb the push & pull,
thinking only of the fish,
sleek & dripping on the line,
neon green parachute ballooning
from its mouth.

I arch my back
& the rod dives.
The fish lifts, slimy as an egg,
spinning like a ballerina
on a silver thread,
its marble eye mute,
fixed on white.

How many times have you watched this world,
blinded, terrified?
There are hands on you
& pliers in your mouth,
metallic, blood-washed.
How many times have you waited
for the water
while everything lurches around you,
brilliant white, like the inside
of a hospital, like the underbelly
of a dream, gasping
to break the surface
toward that cold & sudden light?

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From *Poetry* (2005)

PARTS OF A STORY

Or, it could go like this, since
you want to know names,

places, people, particulars:

it was the particular paradise
of ninety acres of orchard grass
and a few scattered woods;
barbed wire, Holsteins,
and the plush of spring
as you feel it, wet beneath you,
when you sit down in a field in May—

or in the pasture's folds where the creek ran:
there were ores of a grey clay
she could sit and mine all morning;
rotting trees, whose meat flaked off
like the flesh of fish;
or in the barn where the straw-dust
harried and swirled.

It was in *an inheritance*,
since it was given as all earth is given,
as ready to receive the pledge
of a young girl as the cow-flops
and the dull thud of horses' hooves.

We may start here in this field,
with her kneeling, with the colors *wet* and *black*
suddenly pouring up—
but eventually we will have to confront the father,
then the ravishment by air,
then, still later—
the ravishment by imagination.

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Livid: The Kanzler Saga: Apparition Poem #1181

Just as you couldn't paint but to vandalize, I had
the instinct to vandalize you, my love. To rough
you up. Because for you there could be no love,

I would assist you in understanding repercussions
could follow from games you thought were fun.
How your green eyes had a problem— you stared
at things too long. That wide-eyed stare, made it
so that (for example) no one could take you seriously
as swish at a first night. Or on First Fridays, as you
tried to swish towards a homing sense you were going
where you wanted to, your simian male friend at your
side. As I said, I wanted to rough you up. You could
never paint to be crisp, only smudged, so that Abby laughed
at how hard you worked to convey retardation (and succeeded).

I could never decide if, behind the wide-eyed stare,
what was there had any genuine innocence. It seemed
to me, to be honest, there was none. Your sense
of complete calculatedness in every respect is why,
how I now kneel before you, my round browns mingling
with your round greens, brown & green smudging each
other to determine advantages, now that the first nights,
First Fridays are all part of a distant past, the time's come
to choose whether to live or die. I've decided to salvage
us. That's crisp in me. You were crisp about the bed
part of it, for a while, so that I force red into your mix—

.....



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ART RECESS 2

POETRY AND MORE

Adam Fieled (Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, USA): "To Abby Heller-Burnham"

I.

What solidity the years deliver— against
the grain of ephemeral travesties forced
into our inner lives, behind our eyes— I
think of you on those West Philadelphia
nights we all got a blessed buzz going, in
green coloration, so that space/time grew
fluid, and compositions preciously coalesced.
There, splayed out on the wooden floor of Mary's
room, without our own consummation
having happened yet, or needed to happen,
the composition of my thoughts returns, remains
fluid. The goddess-head in your brain remains
what it was, circles under/over circles, I
perceive light, shade, depth, earth-tones, bird-eyes.

II.

As to why the world had to let you
starve at the end (as I myself teetered
towards possible starvation), machine
mechanisms against those such as us
always remain in motion— fanged, foraging.
Everything heaven-hinged here is blood-
spattered; the last time I saw you alive,
headed towards Center City, over the Walnut
Street Bridge, deep dark rings around your
eyes spelled out a narrative of decay, death,
deadened innocence. I knew your temper then, left
you alone. That's when the Liberty Place Towers

Poems

Addendum: Brand
New Key

Apparition Poem
#1574 in Fixator
Press

Apparition Poems in
Eratio

Brand New Key

Deep Wood's Woven
Shade: Apparition
Poem #1347

Apparition Poem
#1180 in Scud

Something Solid:
Aughts Philly:
Dresser in
Lothlor...

Deep Wood's Woven
Shade: Apparition
Poem #1208

P.F.S.:
Correspondence
(2005)

Apparition Poem
#1342 (for Jenny
Kanzler)

Return to

began to frighten me— what was high was cold.
The warmth which gradually returned can never leave.

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Both parts of *To Abby Heller-Burnham, I and II*, appeared in Otoliths 44 in 2017.

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Art Recess

